THE VOYAGE OF THE
LUNA I

The Voyage of the *Luna I*

by

David Craigie

illustrated by
Dorothy Craigie

London
Eyre & Spottiswoode

TO MY PUBLISHER

GRAHAM GREENE

This book, first published in 1948, is produced in full conformity with the Authorized Economy Standards and is printed for Eyre & Spottiswoode (Publishers), Ltd., 15 Bedford Street, London, W.C.2, by Richard Clay and Company, Ltd., Bungay, Suffolk.

CONTENTS

PART ONE

PART TWO

CONTENTS

THE VOYAGE OF THE
LUNA I

Part One

Chapter I

MARTIN and Jane Ridley had lived in the same house all their lives. In fact, since their great-great-great-grandfather returned from Brazil many years ago and settled down there (his exploring days were over, for he had lost his right leg through being mauled by a jaguar), no one except members of the Ridley family had ever occupied it. Although its real name was the Mill House, most people in the surrounding country called it the "Ridley House". The remains of the old water-mill was just beyond the garden, looking down the hill to the village where the cottages, shops and inns straggled up another hill nearly to the edge of the woods. It was a friendly house, from the basement, that always smelt slightly of baking cakes, to the three attics, which had been turned into one large playroom, where Martin and Jane kept their books and fishing-rods, tulip bulbs and cricket bats. Tessie, Jane's black cat, would have her kittens in no other place

than the attic, and Scruff, Martin's fox terrier, had one particular floorboard where he would sniff for hours. Martin had built a rifle-range at one end of the room during his Christmas holidays–for one Christmas morning they found two air-guns marked "Martin" and "Jane"–and their father, who was a crack shot, taught them to shoot. Jane could shoot well, but not as well as Martin, for she had not the patience, and was more anxious to shoot than to aim straight; but during the summer evenings the rounds of shots and Scruff's bark were mingled with the sound of the lawn-mower and the birds' last song before they found their nests.

The house was full of strange objects from all over the world, for nearly every man in the family had been an explorer or a great traveller. There was a nugget to hold the front door open, and Martin always threw his cap up till it perched on the top of a Zulu assegai when he came home from school. Everywhere you would come across something odd. Some things were beautiful, some ugly, some everyone had forgotten long ago what they even were; but no one got rid of them–they were so much part of the house, and it would seem lonely without them. Mrs. Ridley used to grumble about the spiders that fell out of the wild tropical plant that trailed over the porch and came in through the wide windows, but it would never have occurred to her to have it cut down. That plant, like other things in the house, was part of someone's adventures–someone who belonged to her, and to the house.

Martin and Jane were twins, and except once, when Jane had been ill with scarlet fever, they had never been parted. They quarrelled sometimes, but they were as loyal to each other as two people can be, and shared most of each other's joys and sorrows. But although they

were twins, Martin was a boy and Jane a girl, so there were some things they could not share, though Martin agreed that Jane was "almost as good as another boy" They used to walk to school every morning down the hill to the cross-roads; then Martin turned east and Jane west, and as they came home in the afternoon they would wait for each other for five minutes at the cross-roads. If either was five minutes late, the other one would walk on. Jane was very often "kept in" after school; she didn't like school, and had little patience for things she didn't like. Martin was often late home, but that usually meant he was staying longer in the laboratory, for he had found a great interest in chemistry.

During their walks to school Martin and Jane used to plan the expeditions that Martin would make when he was a man; for of course he meant to be an explorer, like his father and his uncles and grandfathers, and promised to take Jane with him as store-keeper. She could cook the things he shot, and dry the meat in preparation for longer journeys into the unknown. Jane was always practical, and asked after a while, "Where will we explore?" Martin would shake his head: he didn't know, but always had a feeling there must be somewhere left on the globe where no white man had ever been.

The autumn is always the time for story-telling, when the smell of burning leaves scents the air and the evenings are chilly, and after tea their father would bring his pipe up to the playroom and tell them stories of his travels and adventures. He always had something new to tell them, for there were not many parts of the world he had not visited at one time or another; and they were very proud, as all boys and girls would be, of the little red patch on the map marked Port Ridley. He had discovered it years ago, when he was a young man, and Martin would often

trace round the tiny red patch with his finger and think of some of the things that happened to his father during that expedition, for it had been one of the most exciting he had ever undertaken. Martin and Jane both loved these long evenings by the fire, with the curtains drawn and the room getting blue from their father's pipe-smoke, that curled lazily round his head and smelt like peat, the popping of the coal before it fell with a plop into the ash-pan, and their father's voice making jungles, deserts, native villages, and icebergs seem things and places they almost knew by sight: for there was no better story-teller, when once he was settled in his comfortable armchair. Jane sat with her knees curled up under her in the armchair opposite him, with Tessie like a puddle of ink in her lap. Martin had to sit on the hearthrug (there were only two chairs), pulling Scruff's ears and staring into the fire. After a time he seemed to forget his father was talking, and stared at the mountains of hot coal, which suddenly became volcanoes, then crashed into earthquakes and landslides, changing the whole landscape and making way for another to build itself; and then a shower of sparks on the soot at the back of the chimney would creep backwards and forwards, like explorers over the black plain in front of them. Jane sat with her eyes fixed on her father and her face pretty and flushed rosy pink with excitement, asking questions and laughing, for some of the stories were very funny. But Martin became silent, and gently pulled Scruff's ears until a yelp brought him back to earth, to the playroom and the sound of his father's voice.

This was always a signal that the stories were over for the night, and Mr. Ridley would get up and stretch, kiss Jane's forehead, and put a friendly hand on Martin's rough, straw-coloured head. "Well, good night. Don't

dream of head-hunters," he would say, and then walk quickly from the room.

He was never quite sure whether he was right in telling them these stories. Jane, of course, enjoyed them; but, then, she was a girl; she would grow up and marry, and her adventures would be in her home and her children. Martin was different. He came from a long line of explorers, and travel was ground in his bones and pumped into his blood and ticked in his brain. And where in all the world would he find adventures of the kind he wanted?

Mr. Ridley loved both his children dearly; but he understood his son better than he did his daughter. He shared his restlessness with Martin, for it was many years since he had left England, and it was a great sorrow to him that he could no longer wander off to some unknown part of the globe, feeling uncertain whether he would enjoy it or hate it, be safe or in danger, return or perish. His thoughts were always a little savage as he walked downstairs to his wife. After all, he had had the excitement he wanted–when he was young exploration was still possible–but he wanted his son to have that excitement, too.

Mr. Ridley opened the drawing-room door rather noisily. His wife was playing patience over the fire, and wondering where she had put the Queen of Hearts. She looked up and smiled as he came in.

"Have you shut up the story book for to-night, dear?" she asked.

Her husband nodded slowly, and dug a pipe-cleaner through his pipe stem.

"Yes, over for to-night. I'm afraid I sow a lot of unrest with my bed-time stories. Jane is safe, bless her. She wants to see her jungles, but would be quite content to see them

through a railway carriage window–if they run railways through jungles now, and I've no doubt they do. But not Martin. My heart is always heavy about Martin's future."

Mrs. Ridley reshuffled her playing-cards.

"My dear, I'm sure there's nothing to worry about," she answered. "There's not a happier boy in the world than Martin, and his school reports are excellent; History and Geography both very good. And last prize-giving day I had a long talk to Professor Leigh, and he told me that Martin was quite outstanding–in fact, no boy in a senior class can stand up to him, and he needs little or no assistance during his laboratory tests. I'm sure you need not feel heavy-hearted about Martin: there's science and engineering; he has an interest in both."

"Science is a fascinating profession, I agree; but I don't feel that adventure within four walls of a laboratory and a test tube is what he wants. However, I suppose it will pan out in some way." He sighed. "I'll take Scruff out for a long run before bed-time; we could both do with some exercise. I won't be long, though."

He smiled at her and went into the hall and whistled. Scruff came helter-skelter down the staircase, sending the small mats flying and knocking over the umbrella-stand, shook himself and barked wildly. There were always rabbit-holes for Scruff to explore.

Mrs. Ridley sat looking into the fire for a long time after her husband had left. She could not share his uneasiness about Martin, and she was thankful, as most explorer's wives are, that there were so few places left undiscovered in the world; and she was thankful, too, that she would not have to spend months on end worrying over her son, as she had had to do over her husband when he went off on his wanderings. She loved her husband,

her children, and her home, and wanted to keep them together with her and care for them. Yes, she was very thankful.

There was someone else upstairs who looked into the fire after his sister had gone to bed and his dog had scampered downstairs for a walk. His mother was right –Martin was a very happy boy. But his father was right, too–Martin longed to go far away to unknown lands; to cross deserts where the sand had never known a human foot; and cut his way through jungles where only animals had prowled, and to sail his ship through Arctic seas to the mountains and the plains of ice. Like his father, he sighed. He walked over to the bookshelves and ran his eyes over the books. He took down a dilapidated copy of "Captain Cook's Voyages" and went to bed.

Chapter II

MARTIN lay awake for a long time listening to the odd assortment of sounds that you always hear in the country at night; they are pleasant, and you are never quite certain what they are or where they come from: the only sound you are certain about is the striking of the church clock. When the clock struck eleven Martin sat up. His window was wide open, overlooking the big stretch of meadows leading to the woods, and the smell of bracken and cows came into the room. It was a clear, still night, with the sky darker blue than Martin had ever seen it. One of those nights that look as if someone has thrown up the stars by the handful to stick to the sky, and the moon was

like a silver nail-paring, shining on the little stream that ran through the meadows. It was all very still, except, now and then, the soft, mysterious night sounds, that made it seem more silent than ever when they stopped.

Martin got out of bed carefully and reached for his clothes: his eyes were so accustomed to the darkness that he could see almost as well as if it were daylight. He dressed quickly, and then reached under his bed and hauled out a long box with a strap round it. He put this over one shoulder, then fetched a torch from his chest of drawers. He stopped and listened for a moment, and then climbed out of his window, feeling his way down the wall with his feet for the iron stakes he had driven in between the bricks and covered with the trailing vine. A few feet from the ground he jumped; listened again. It was all quiet: everything in the world seemed asleep except him. Then he ran quickly across the meadows towards the woods.

He stopped, a little breathless, at the beginning of the wood: there were too many loose branches lying about to run now. He wondered what the time was, and wished that his birthday was a little nearer; for he had been promised a stop watch for a present, and just now a watch would have been a very useful thing to him: he would have to rely as usual on the church clock. Just then it struck the half hour. He couldn't stay more than an hour, he thought, his mother asked so many questions if he yawned through breakfast; but if he got back to bed by twelve forty-five he'd be all right. He turned off from the narrow path into a thicker part of the wood until he came to a large, heavily branched tree, and swung himself up to one of the lower branches and raked about for a moment; then let down a rope and jumped to the ground. He braced his foot against the tree-trunk and

climbed hand over hand up the rope and disappeared into the thick branches.

This was his one hiding-place. Jane knew about it, but had never been there. He had built it out of planks of wood from old hen-coops that his father had thrown on the rubbish dump and canvas from garden chairs that had become too rotten to use: the planks lashed to the branches made a firm platform, and the canvas was stretched across to make a roof and sides. There was a little raised platform, too. On this he put the long box and the torch, and sat cross-legged while he unstrapped the box.

Because it's natural to keep quiet in the dark, he moved as silently and carefully as possible, although there was no house near him for a mile around, and as far as he knew no people: tramps seldom came into the woods; but he was always careful that no one knew where his hide-out was. He took out his telescope and tripod. The telescope was one of his most prized possessions, for he had made it himself from a cardboard tube, a roll of stiff brown paper, a convex lens about two and a half inches in diameter for his object glass and another set for his eye-lens. The blacksmith had been helpful, too, in making him some metal rims, and though it wasn't very successful for some of the brighter objects in the sky, he managed to see a great many things with it, including the satellites of Jupiter. He had several ideas for improving it so that he might see more clearly the moon's face.

He settled the telescope on the tripod and put his eye to the lens and gently turned the screw. He never tired of the exciting story-book of the sky; for a very great number of stars and planets are named after names of mythical Greek heroes and incidents occurring in Greek legends, and one can trace story after story in the

spangled sky as the earth, so small compared with many stars and planets, turns round and round beneath it, year after year, century after century. His father had an old illustrated atlas, full of the most beautiful drawings illustrating the constellations, and Martin tried night by night to trace the myths and legends of the sky. One day, he thought, something will happen and I'll have a real telescope, one through which I can see everything there is to see in the sky.

Although sometimes he was a little disappointed when he could not see the things he wanted to, he was quite content with his home-made telescope, and to-night he was so busy on focusing his glass that he neither saw nor heard the short, sturdy black figure walking down the path leading to the thicket. The figure stopped.

"Now what can that light be?" it said softly. "The eye of an owl? No. Something that should not be there? Yes. Trees are no place for lights, my friend. Go and see what it is."

Professor Erdleigh always talked and muttered to himself; he said it kept him from being bored with his own company. He trod carefully over fallen branches, hardly making a sound till he reached the tree.

"Who's there?" he called up sharply.

Martin held his breath. Then lifted up one of the side flaps and looked down on the figure who with legs planted well apart and black beard tilted looked up at him.

"What are you doing up there?" asked the Professor.

Martin hesitated a minute.

"Just looking at the sky, that's all," he answered gruffly.

"I saw a light from the path. What are you doing with a light? Signalling?" the Professor inquired.

"No," said Martin. "It's the moon reflecting on the

lens of my telescope, I expect. This," he went on proudly, "is my observatory."

The Professor chuckled.

"Well, well, do you ever invite people to look over your observatory? They do at Greenwich sometimes."

Martin considered a moment. It was the last thing he wanted, strangers poking around his hide-out.

"Who are you?" he called down.

"Oh, I'm Professor Erdleigh," the Professor answered.

This was the most exciting moment Martin had ever known. But how exciting he didn't know at that time. All he knew was that Professor Erdleigh was the inventor of a giant rocket that was to fly to the moon in a few days.

"Do you weigh very much?" Martin asked.

"No. Why?" answered the Professor.

"Well, catch!" He threw down the rope. "I'll put the torch on. There's a thick branch near the platform that makes a step. There's plenty of room here, and it's quite safe, really, as long as you don't weigh too much."

The Professor was up the rope like a monkey, then sat cross-legged beside his host and grinned. Martin fished about in the branches and brought out a box of biscuits and handed it to the Professor.

"My goodness!" exclaimed the Professor. "You are cosy here. Biscuits, too!" He munched his biscuit and looked at the telescope. "So that's where the light came from!"

Martin explained how he'd made it and how it worked, and wondered how he could bring the conversation round to the rocket.

"And so you come up here and gaze at the wonders of the sky, with a telescope you've made by yourself. Oh, of course the blacksmith helped! I think we're going to be friends. You climb out of your window, I

suppose? Well, that's the way to get what you want." The Professor laughed. "You know, when I saw that light I couldn't imagine what it could be. You see, for the next few days I must be very careful. I've no doubt you've heard all kind of rumours about the doings at the aerodrome. I am in constant fear of spies. In a few days the hoarding round the flying-field will be down and all the world can see; but till then one has to be very careful. I thought you were signalling to somebody, and was prepared to haul you off to the nearest police station! Instead I find a new friend who shares many of my own interests, prowling in the country at night, inventing things, sky-gazing, and of course biscuits!"

He dived into the box.

The only sound for some time was the munching of biscuits.

"Will we be able to see the rocket when the flying-field is open again?" asked Martin.

The Professor nodded with his mouth full.

"Yes: Major Topham, who has organised the expedition, is having a grand opening ceremony, and will explain the objects of his flight."

"His son, Cyril Topham, goes to my school," said Martin.

"Ah," answered the Professor, "Cyril. And is he a great friend of yours?"

"No," said Martin, "he's not."

"Somehow I thought he wasn't," the Professor laughed. "He asks questions–oh yes, questions by the thousand–but not from interest. I suspect it's only to tell the other boys when he gets to school in the morning."

"Yes," answered Martin. "He said the other day that he was going on the flight with his father. Of course we didn't believe him."

"Nonsense! Of course he's not going. There's only five of us in the crew, and we're all going for some special scientific purpose or other."

"Are you going?" asked Martin.

"Yes, most certainly. Do you think I'd let my rocket go without me–my beautiful, long, shining 'Luna'? That's her name. She is like a huge, kind shark, with her long tail and graceful fins. I've spent many years making her perfect and beautiful. Yes, I shall most certainly go with her." The Professor sat forward, hugging his knees and stared through the branches at the moon shining her slim crescent down on them. "I wonder what it is really like up there. We know a great deal, we've learnt much in the last few years, but we've never seen it close enough. The finest telescope in the world can't show us what our eyes can. Experts go up and test atmosphere, but only to a certain height; botanists make their calculations and tell us nothing can live there. But I wonder. I wonder very much how right anyone has been so far. However, we'll know in a week or so."

"Do you think things and people do live there?" asked Martin.

"I doubt if people live there; no, I think that's impossible. But I think it's quite possible that there is insect life. You see, we know the moon is made up of volcanic ash. Well, insects are very queer things: they can live on the most unlikely substances; so many kinds live in dry rotten wood. How do we know there are not some strange specie that breed and live in volcanic ash? Everything suggests that there are none, but I like to see these things for myself, then I am sure." The Professor put his eye to the lens and turned the screw. "I'm afraid you'll not see much of the moon through your telescope, good as it is," he remarked.

"One day I'll have a real one, a huge one, and I'll be able to see everything," Martin said dreamily. "I'd like to see the one in Mount Wilson Observatory."

"It's the most wonderful telescope you can imagine: the size takes your breath away. You'll see it one day, never fear, you'll see it."

The Professor patted his shoulder. Martin liked his new friend better than anyone he'd ever met.

"I hope I shall see you again," he said to the Professor. "There are so many things I want to ask you and talk to you about. Besides, you are the only one who has been here. No one except Jane knows about it, and she's never been here."

"Of course you will see me again. I don't tell people they are my friends and then never see them again. But who is Jane?" asked the Professor.

"Oh, Jane's my sister; she's my twin. She's really awfully nice; you'd like her. We do most things together, but I don't let her come here; there's bound to be a row when Mother and Father find out that I come here at night, and, after all, it was my idea, and she hasn't as much interest in the sky as I have. Besides, I like somewhere that's my own," Martin answered, and turned round to face the moon.

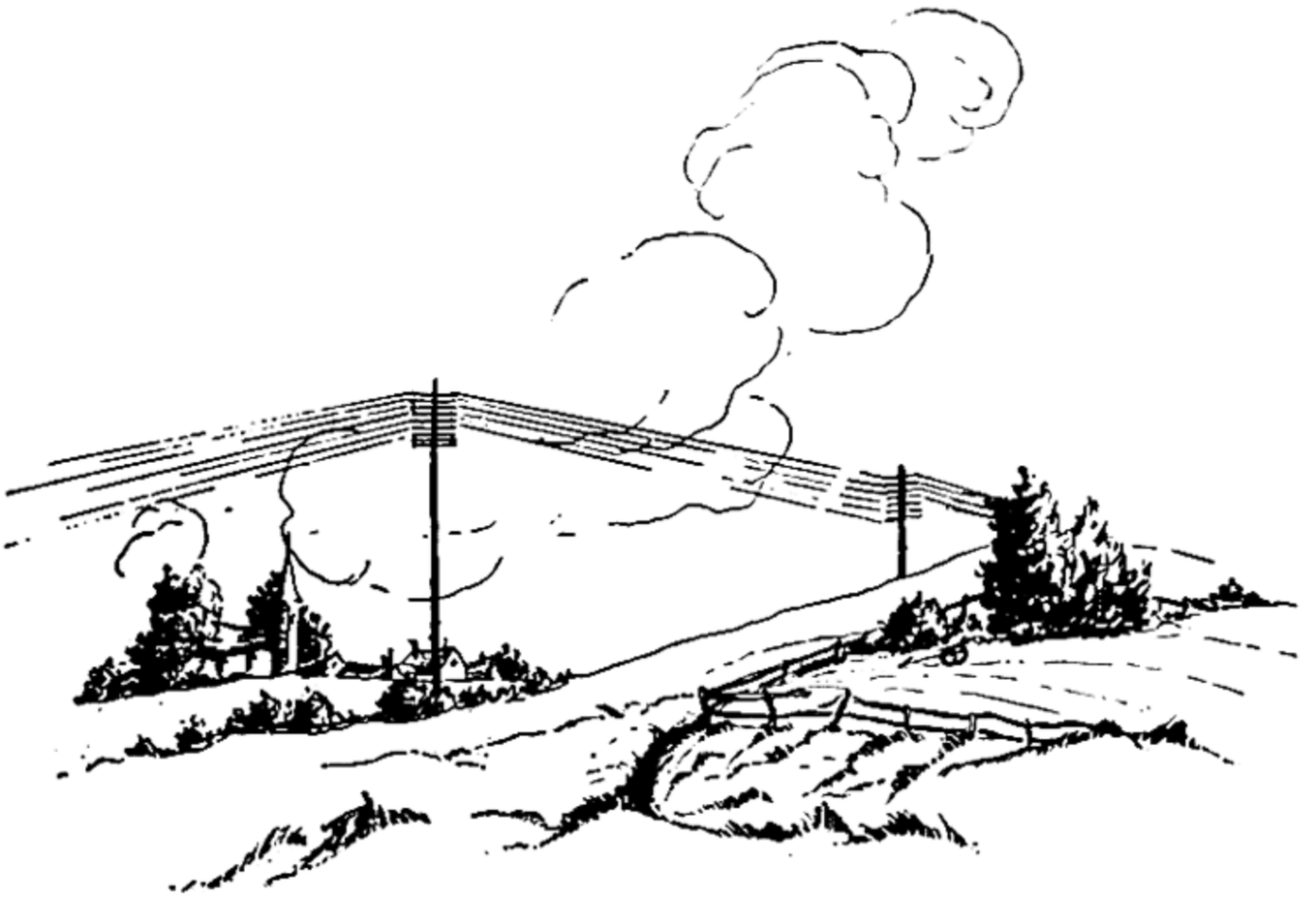
The Professor looked at his watch.

"It's time you got back to bed," he told Martin. "It's after one o'clock. How far have you to walk home?"

"Only to Mill House. I run quite a lot of the way, so it doesn't take long."

"The Mill House. I know it. Your father is Stephen Ridley, the explorer. I've never met him, although I know his name, of course." The Professor looked at Martin. "You've come from a very great family of travellers. Are you going to be one, too?"

Martin sighed and pulled off a leaf and chewed it.
"Where is there left to explore?" he asked gloomily.
The Professor waved his hand towards the sky.
"There. Eventually," he answered.
The church clock struck one.



Chapter III

"YOUR father's very late this morning," said Mrs. Ridley as she passed Jane her coffee. "He's not late for breakfast as a rule. I wonder where he is?"

Martin stifled a yawn. His mother looked at him.

"I think I shall take you to see Dr. Scubby, Martin; it's not right for a boy of your age to be so sleepy in the morning, and as you say you don't read long in bed–and I know you don't because your light is always out early–I can see no reason for it."

She buttered her toast and glanced anxiously at him.

"I'm all right, Mother, really I am: it's a kind of habit, like the one I had when I used to blink my eyes, it's nothing. Really it's nothing. I don't feel a bit sleepy."

Jane looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. Last night was a bright, clear night, and she knew the reason for Martin's yawns.

The dining-room door opened, and in came Mr. Ridley and Scruff from their early morning walk.

"Sorry I'm late; met old Scubby on his early round. What do you think the latest is about this confounded rocket? Major Topham is having a huge opening ceremony at the flying-field with the rocket on view. Topham!" He sat down heavily and helped himself to sausages and bacon. "Topham," he scowled. "I wouldn't go on an expedition as far as the local railway station if it was organised by a man like that!" he went on, glaring at his plate. "Of all the fools, and thinking he's going to walk about the moon! Of course the rocket will never start, for one thing."

He gulped down his coffee.

Martin choked. He longed to tell him about Professor Erdleigh, but that meant giving too much away. He went on with his breakfast.

"Why people can't be content to stay where they are, I don't know," said Mrs. Ridley. "There's no sense in going to the moon. What do they expect to do when they get there?"

"They won't get there, my dear, if Topham is organising it. I hear that Professor Erdleigh has invented the rocket and is going with them. I don't like to hear of a man of his reputation mixed up with a fool like Topham."

Mr. Ridley passed his cup for some more coffee.

"Is Professor Erdleigh very famous, then, Father?" asked Martin, with elaborate carelessness.

"Yes, very. But Topham is a very rich man, and a vain one, too, and loves publicity. The Professor is a brilliant man, but poor–that's the answer."

Mr. Ridley pushed back his plate.

"Well, they are very brave men," said Jane. "How will they get back?"

"Spare parts of another rocket shot up and then assembled there, I suppose," answered her father. "The

whole thing is absurd, with Topham at the head of it, anyway." He looked over at Martin. "How's young Cyril taking it?"

"Oh, he says he's going, too. We drop paper caps behind him and stamp on them. You should see him jump–nearly out of his shoes!"

They all laughed, for Cyril Topham, like his father, was not a favourite with anyone in the village. He was greedy, pampered and a bully.

Major Topham had bought a large and beautiful manor house on the outskirts of the village about a year before. He was a rich, domineering man whose lack of taste and good manners greatly annoyed everyone in the surrounding district. His first action was to "reconstruct" the graceful old Manor, building on to it wings entirely out of keeping with its period or scale, until it looked, as Mr. Ridley declared, like a local fun fair. He had by means of his wealth become a public figure, giving vasts sums of money to local charities and organising fêtes, but always with the greatest publicity, and his loud, booming voice was to be heard in the midst of the largest gatherings. No one from the highest to the lowest in the district liked him, but it was admitted that he was a good landlord and a generous philanthropist; but even these qualities failed to endear him to the people who came in contact with him. His latest form of publicity was to organise an expedition to the moon by rocket. Although the expedition had been kept secret, rumours had been allowed to circulate to make the public curious and to cause them to speculate on the truth of the flight. All this had been carefully thought out and organised by the unpopular Major, and now he had announced that in a few days he would tell the public the secret at a large garden-party and opening ceremony to celebrate the

completion of the rocket and the reopening of the aerodrome, which had been closed for several months while the inter-planetary rocket was being built. Major Topham's sternest critics were Mr. Ridley and his old friend, Dr. Scubby. Dr. Scubby's feelings were mainly amused contempt, but Mr. Ridley felt a profound disgust for the large, bulky Major, whose surface generosities and bogus good humour had made him a public figure.

Mr. Ridley unfolded his morning paper.

"Time you started for school," he said, glancing over the top of the paper. "Off you go."

Martin and Jane scrambled to their feet and went off in search of hats and school bags.

All the way down the hill Martin was very silent. Then he yawned.

"Were you very late home last night?" asked Jane.

"Yes," he answered, "very. I had a most exciting night; I met Professor Erdleigh."

Then he told her about the meeting in the wood, the rocket and the Professor's idea of the moon.

"Think of the luck those people have," Martin went on, "being able to go there and see things in another world, things that as far as we know, simply don't exist. Places like that are the only places left to go to. I'm glad Cyril can't go; he doesn't really want to–he only says it to try and make us envious."

"Which he does," laughed Jane.

"No, he doesn't," retorted Martin.

"You know quite well you're furious in case he *might* have a chance of going," went on Jane. "You are always furious if someone can do something you can't."

They reached the cross-roads and stopped.

"See you after school," Jane said.

"I'm going on the common after tea with my kite;

coming?" he asked surlily, although at that moment he felt that he never wanted to see her again; she had an annoying habit of hitting nails on the head.

"No," answered Jane. "Mother wants me to wind all that wool into balls to send down to the Institute tomorrow. I promised I'd help her."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Off they went: Martin down the east road and Jane down the west.

There was a good steady wind blowing up as Martin walked over the common after tea that afternoon. He had made some improvements to his kite, and was anxious to see how they worked. The two fins he had made caught every gust of wind, and it was difficult to control the kite. He held it flat against his chest and looked over the top of the sail to find the best place to fly it. He struggled up the rising hill away from the trees and sat down to get his breath. Far down beyond the village he could see the flying-field and the hangars round the aerodrome. It looked small and neat, like a model built from a meccano set shining in the evening sun, with one great dark brown patch of the canvas shed where the rocket was being assembled. Every now and then the tiny figure of a man would run across the field, or come out of the shed; they looked like ants from the top of the hill. Martin chewed a piece of grass and watched them moodily.

The only movements anywhere around him were the rustling trees in the wind, the clouds chasing each other across the sky and the busy men down there in the flying-field. A cow somewhere in the distance set up her mournful wail, and a man shouted, then silence again, and the busy men ran backwards and forwards, building the shining monster which was to soar 239,000 miles

through space: to another planet where no living creature had been, and all that was known about it was through the eye-lens of a telescope.

A gust of wind blew the kite from the ground and hit Martin in the face and brought him back from his day-dream. He stood up and began to pay out the twine from the reel. The kite gathered height, darting and zig-zagging as the wind caught it. Martin ran with it, paying out the twine. The new fins had made it more difficult to control, and every few yards he had to bend backwards to balance himself. He'd make a longer tail, he thought that would make a difference to the height. The wind was rising and blowing in heavy gusts. One caught the kite and carried it along with such force that Martin had to run at full speed. He tried to pull back the twine, but the force was too great. As he went over the hill and down to the road running to the village, a gust of wind whirled the kite round and tangled the twine round one of the telegraph poles. Martin twitched and jerked the guide-line, but the kite was clinging firmly to the pole. The reel was too big to put in his pocket, for he had wound about two miles of twine on it, and would need both hands to climb the pole and disentangle the kite. If he left the reel on the ground he might be worse off than ever, in this high wind. He went on jerking and twisting the line. Presently he heard a shout from the road behind him. He turned, and saw Professor Erdleigh running towards him.

"Hold on," panted the Professor.

Martin was delighted: here was someone who would know exactly what to do. The Professor put on a final spurt and stopped dead, panting and groaning into his inky little beard.

"Careful, Martin," he said, "or you'll damage your

kite. Give me the reel and then climb up the pole; you're more used to climbing than I am! Up you go."

Martin put his foot on the iron step and began to climb. The Professor reeled in the twine as Martin disentangled the kite.

"It's all clear," Martin shouted down. "Pull her in tightly."

He scrambled down the pole.

"I've put fins on the kite," he told the Professor. "I thought it might increase height; it certainly does speed."

The Professor sat down and examined it.

"Very good. Very well made. Yes, the fins would increase height, but you want a longer tail to balance them," said the Professor.

"Yes. That's what I thought. I'll make a longer one to-morrow and see what happens. Of course it'll never get very high: I mean it couldn't get into the stratosphere, no matter what I did to it, could it?" Martin asked.

The Professor shook his head.

"No, no; you mustn't expect too much from it. A kite can climb about four and a half miles, that's all; and it would have to be much bigger than this one. When I come back from the moon we'll build one together–a huge one–and perhaps we'll beat the record! Don't forget when I come home I'll know a lot more about altitude and the stratosphere than I do now."

He laughed as he tightened one of the fins.

Martin watched him thoughtfully.

"Yes; you'll know a lot when you come back. No one has gone as high as Piccard so far, have they?" he asked.

"Oh yes, they have," answered the Professor, closing one eye and squinting down the fin. "He was beaten by several miles. It was useful, but that kind of meteorological research has, of course, always been done by balloon,

and all we know about the air above that height is from observation of meteors, radio waves, light, and things like that; but with a rocket we can reach height that would be impossible for any balloon."

The professor had put down the kite and was lying on his back staring up at the bright, green-blue evening sky.

"Because of its motor, I suppose," Martin said.

"Because of its motor, yes; and because it carries its own oxygen supply. That makes it possible to enter the rarefied upper atmosphere: you see, it can 'push' even when there's no air. Naturally it depends on the shape of the rocket, speed, and of course fuel. Fuel has been the greatest difficulty. Some you can't store for long; some clogs the motor. In fact it's done everything it can to make our way as hard as possible. But at last we've found the right fuel, and–I cross my fingers–the right-shaped rocket!" The Professor sat up suddenly and hugged his knees. "Martin," he said seriously, "do you realise what the launching of the 'Luna' will mean? Travel we've only dreamt of. The moon is only the beginning; it's the nearest planet to the earth, and one of the smallest. It only looks big because it's so near to us; but the farther ones–we know even less about them than we do about the moon. Mars. Now, there's a distinct possibility of life there. We know there are canals; some people think they are artificially constructed." He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps. But canals mean water. Where there's water there must be life of some kind or another." He rolled over on his back again, his eyes on the sky. "Yes, Mars will have to be the next."

"I wonder if you'll find any kind of life on the moon?" wondered Martin.

The Professor screwed up his face thoughtfully.

"I'm very doubtful. Insects, I think, are the only possi-

bility. Extreme heat and cold, lack of water, just ash, and no light. It's like a mirror reflecting the sun and our earth; obviously no vegetation. No, I think Mars is the only one where we could find life. Of course there it's as cold as the North Pole and never warmer than a November afternoon, as far as we know; but there are certainly changes in the seasons, it might be on account of a growth of vegetation, also there's snow, so there must be atmosphere. But, with all its possibilities, somehow it doesn't interest me like that cold, brilliant crescent which will shine down on us to-night."

Martin's attention didn't wander from the Professor's story, as it did from his father's. His father's tales were always of things that had already happened; the Professor's were of things that were going to happen, and quickly–in a few days. He was afraid to ask too many questions, for the rocket had been kept such a great secret. For weeks there had been rumours, but the secret had been strictly guarded. In fact, many people didn't believe the rocket really existed, and thought it was another exaggerated claim on the part of Major Topham.

"When will the flying-field be open?" said Martin.

"Well, it depends on weather conditions. You see, we don't want people trooping down to the field for days on end, and our flight can only be made in clear weather. But I think the weather looks like settling now, so it's pretty safe to say the day after to-morrow. That gives the sightseers about two days, and then we're off!" The Professor laughed. "I left Major Topham rehearsing his speech this afternoon."

"Will you make one?" Martin asked.

The Professor sat bolt upright.

"I make one? Good heavens, no! I'd be terrified. No. I'll leave all that to Major Topham. I'll be hiding some-

where underneath 'Luna'. I'd rather simply take off quietly one night, but it seems a grand ceremony is part of the flight."

"There's so many things I want to ask you about the 'Luna'. I know I mustn't, but you'll explain things to me when she is on view, won't you?" said Martin.

"Why, of course: everything you want to know. The sightseers will be so busy listening to Major Topham's speech and eating all the cakes and drinking all the tea he's going to provide that poor 'Luna' will probably be forgotten. We'll go all over her together, and I'll tell you just how she works: it's all very simple. We are sending up an experimental rocket first. Exactly like 'Luna' in every way: size, speed, motor–everything except our scientific equipment. The weight of our instruments, supplies, and passengers will be made up by ballast. The spearhead will be packed with flash pellets. When the rocket lands they will explode, and then we'll know she's struck the moon," the Professor told him.

"Suppose it overshot the moon, where would it land?" asked Martin.

"Probably Venus. Anyway, we'd never know if it did, because of the great clouds that envelop that planet all the time. We might see something, but it's doubtful. Anyway, she won't overshoot; every tiny object is set so that she will land just where we want her to." He took out his watch. "I'd no idea it was so late. I'll have to run all the way to the village; most undignified for a middle-aged professor."

He scrambled up from the road bank.

"I wonder how Major Topham is getting on with his speech! He's making an appeal to pet owners for someone to let him have a cat and dog to send up in the experimental rocket. I've no idea why, it's quite unnecessary,

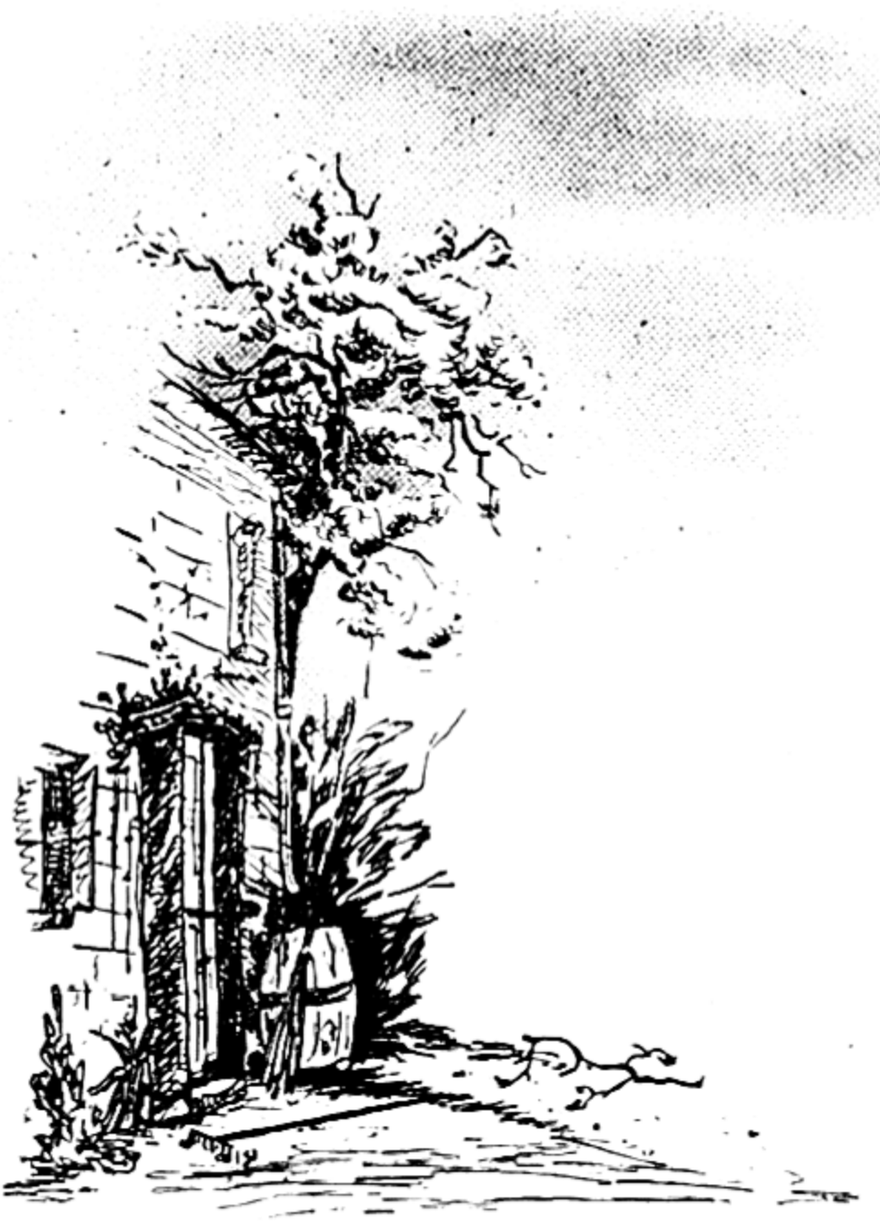
and I should think it's doubtful if anyone will let their pets go off all alone to the moon; but that part's a secret until he announces it."

Martin stared at the Professor without speaking.

"If I take a midnight stroll in the woods I'll look out for you," the Professor said, "so good-bye for a little while."

Martin smiled vaguely as the Professor turned and ran swiftly down the long road to the village.

Martin sat staring at the telegraph pole for a long time. His brain was reeling round and round and his heart thumped against his side. A little trickle of sweat ran down inside his shirt. A gnat bit his knee, and he scratched it absent-mindedly, still staring at the pole. He got up slowly and walked towards the wood to his observatory, his kite, which had meant a great deal to him an hour ago, lying forgotten on the roadside.



Chapter IV

It was after six o'clock when Martin walked up the path leading to Mill House. He went round to the back entrance, straight upstairs to the bathroom and took a long drink of water, then put his head under the cold tap. He was getting used to this new strange feeling. His head felt hot and sticky. He wanted to avoid seeing Jane alone until to-morrow morning; there were still so many things to think out and plan. If only things went well, he thought as he rubbed his face with a rough towel. But they would. He thought of the Professor and the faith he had in the "Luna". Well, he'd have the same faith in the things he meant to do. He looked at his face closely in the shaving-mirror. His mother noticed everything: he wondered if

she would notice anything different about him to-day. Anyway, he told himself, she couldn't see inside his head! He heard his father and mother talking underneath the window, then Jane's voice and Scruff's bark. They were all out in the garden; he'd better go down while they were all together.

As he came along the gravel path to the garden his father was raking the fallen autumn leaves and stacking them on a bonfire. He put his hands in his pockets and started to whistle rather tonelessly.

All through his life Martin never smelt burning leaves without the thought of that evening coming back to him. The wind had dropped, and it was getting cold and heavy. He saw the garden, and the blurred figures of his father and mother through the blue-grey smoke from the bonfire. Jane was sitting on a plank of wood over the water-butt, the collar of her school blazer turned up, and her eyes round and serious.

"I think it's monstrous," his mother was saying–"perfectly monstrous."

"I think it's typical of Topham," answered his father, as he heaved another pile of leaves on the fire. "Anything to create a sensation and draw a little more attention to himself."

Martin stopped whistling and walked over to the bonfire, kicking at the leaves.

"What's he done now?" he asked.

"Well, it seems the rumours are quite true: they are going to shoot this rocket to the moon. But they're sending up an experimental one first. Topham has sent out an appeal–or is sending one, I don't know which–for someone to lend him–lend him, mind you–a cat and dog to shoot up in the beastly thing. Let him risk his foolish neck if he likes, but cats and dogs are harmless, useful and nice

creatures. They'll either crash down somewhere or be blown to smithereens; and even if they land on the moon they'll starve to death. And for what reason?" Mr. Ridley lifted one side of the pile of smouldering leaves to make a draught, and tongues of flame shot up. "If it could assist science, well, there might be something to be said for it; but as they seem to have so much faith in this rocket, why don't they go themselves?"

He handed the rake to Martin.

"It's your turn to be stoker Martin. I'm nearly choked."

Mrs. Ridley shook her head.

"I only hope no one will be foolish enough to let him have their poor animals, that's all." She went on shaking her head. "I don't, of course, wish any harm to Major Topham, but I wish he'd just quietly move away from the district."

"Oh, he'll move away all right, in a few days, by all accounts–but not quietly. There will be a fête at the flying-field, speeches, weak tea and stale cakes and then a tremendous bang, and up goes Topham."

Mr. Ridley dug savagely into his pipe with a piece of stick, and Jane giggled nervously. Mrs. Ridley coughed.

"This smoke is really dreadful, dear; blowing straight into the house. I'll go and make some tea: we'll all be parched dry."

She turned and disappeared through the glass doors leading to the drawing-room.

"We'd better make a chimney to carry the smoke round to the other side," said Mr. Ridley, sitting comfortably down on the garden roller.

Martin was glad to escape round the other side of the fire behind the smoke. It was a relief to have something to do; for trying to appear normal was an added burden on his mind.

"Shall I come and help, Martin?" called out Jane.

"No, no, stay where you are," Martin answered hastily. "I can manage."

Scruff jumped and barked excitedly, bringing sticks and stones to be thrown for him. Martin bent down and rubbed the rough, square head which was turned up to him with two rows of strong white teeth and a long pink tongue lolling out. He bent down and put his face close to the dog's. The stubbly hairs felt good and friendly. He put his arms round Scruff and lifted him up.

"You don't know what's going to happen, Scruff," he whispered, and held the dog tightly. "Good Scruff!"

The dog licked Martin's face and ears and gave an excited yelp; with its paws on the boy's shoulders, it nuzzled its nose behind his collar and blew down his back. Scruff understood a great deal.

As Jane drummed her heels against the water-butt, and his father sat moodily smoking his pipe on the garden roller, Martin worked at the bonfire, making the current of air run through and re-stacking it; and all the while wondering how on earth he was going to introduce the subject of offering Scruff and Tessie for the flight. His mother was horrified at the very idea, and his father was angry, and it was impossible to tell them the other things that were in his mind. It was too early to confide in Jane. She'd be a great help, as she was always so practical; but he'd need a little time to think things out. He drew his hand over his face and smeared the smoke and sweat that was trickling down, then took off his coat and hung it on a low branch of the lime-tree. He caught sight of a telegraph pole in the distance and remembered his kite. Perhaps some other boy would find it. It was no use; it was too small.

Mrs. Ridley came to the drawing-room door.

" I've made lots of tea," she called. "It's getting cold out there, too; come along in. Martin!" she laughed. "You look like a sweep! Go and wash quickly."

Martin, glad of any escape, dashed upstairs and locked himself in the bathroom. The cold water felt good. That's what he wanted–cold. He wondered how he was going to get through the hours until it was dark. He'd go to the observatory, of course. Then it occurred to him he might meet the Professor. There were so many things he wanted to ask the Professor, but he didn't want to waste time talking to-night; that could be done later, when all his plans were ready. But he was too restless to stay indoors; perhaps he would just go for a walk and sit in some other part of the woods. Then an idea came to him. The old ruined water-mill: he used to go there before he made his observatory. He'd climb up and sit on the rafters open to the sky. He sighed with great relief. That was one small thing settled, anyway. And he walked down to the drawing-room, where his father was teasing Jane about taking the piece of cake with the most nuts on the top.

Scruff jumped up from the hearthrug as Martin came in, and ran across to him, wagging his tail and putting his head on one side. "Everyone seems so normal–as if nothing has happened," he thought. "Well, nothing has happened to them."

He drank his tea in great gulps, watching the flames licking the logs in the fire-grate: yellow, orange, and brilliant blue tongues shot up between the heavy, slow-moving smoke, turning the logs to ash–grey, white, and light brown ash. . . . He gulped down the last of his tea and took a piece of cake.

"Martin drinks like a horse," Jane teased him, "and eats like one, too!"

She ducked her head, expecting the usual attack. He went on eating and looked vaguely at her.

"You need not duck, Jane," laughed her father. "Martin's on his dignity to-night."

"I'm not," answered Martin. "I'm thirsty."

He took another cup of tea and sat down. His father was explaining the plans he had for enlarging their small orchard.

Martin sat low down in his chair, sipping the scalding tea and watching his father. He had a tremendous feeling of guilt. Not towards his mother: she would never understand how he felt. But his father was different: he always understood. He was the kind of man you could talk to–for hours if you wanted to and who would remain silent; but he had an uncanny way of interrupting at exactly the right moment. Martin longed to tell him of the great adventure ahead; but he couldn't.

As he watched the tall, thin man sprawling in the armchair, who had seen and done so many things, and was now simply talking about apple-trees, he felt an overwhelming affection and friendship for him–not as his father, a man twenty-five years his senior; but as a contemporary, a great and trustworthy friend. He had never felt the pull towards his father so strongly as now, on the eve of his great adventure.

Mr. Ridley stood up and threw another log on the fire. Everyone else began to move, too.

"Letters," groaned Mr. Ridley. "I'll see how many I can write before dinner."

He stretched lazily.

"I'll go and do some work," said Martin.

"Work at this time, Martin?"

His mother always disliked them working much at night.

"Yes, Mother," Martin answered. "Something I want to work out."

"Anything I can do to help?" asked his father. "Letters can always wait."

Martin looked at him and shook his head slowly.

"No, thanks; I can manage—just a problem to think out."

He smiled.

The father and son stood side by side. No one could have mistaken them for anything else: they both had the same close-cut, straw-coloured hair, the same light grey eyes–the kind of eyes that can see far ahead and are strong in the sunlight–and their wrists always seemed to be a little too long for their coat-sleeves.

Mr. Ridley put his hand on Martin's shoulder.

" 'Men must work and women must weep'," he quoted. "Not that your mother and Jane look like weeping."

"You pull Jane's hair hard enough and see," said Martin over his shoulder.

Jane made a dive at him, but he was out of the room and had shut the door before she reached it.

The church clock tolled the hours until midnight, and gradually the great silence crept over the woods and the meadows, and the air was scented with burning leaves. A small figure, black against the sky, climbed up the ruined brickwork of the water-mill. It disappeared into the shadows and reappeared again, swinging itself up to the rafters, where it settled, facing the silver crescent.

Chapter V

MARTIN ran down to breakfast the next morning whistling one of Sousa's marches. He was still whistling when he drew his chair up to the table and attacked his porridge. He caught his father's eyes over the top of the newspaper.

"Sorry, Father," Martin said cheerfully, "I wasn't thinking what I was doing."

He dug small holes in his porridge, like craters, and slowly poured in the milk. His father propped the newspaper against the coffee-pot, and the family went on silently with their breakfast.

Mr. Ridley gave a cross between a laugh and a grunt and waved the newspaper in the air.

"Major Topham is at last telling the world," he said contemptuously. "Listen to this. Heading. 'Rocket to Fly to the Moon.'

" 'Major Cyril Topham, O.B.E., has planned a daring expedition to the moon by a giant rocket, the "Luna".

" 'The secret of this flight has been heavily guarded; but from time to time rumours have leaked out, and it has been the principal topic in the small Kentish village surrounding the aerodrome where the rocket is being assembled in its vast canvas shed.

" 'Major Topham has become a great public figure in the district during the last year, and is a born organiser, so the expedition is regarded with keen interest, not only by his friends, but in distinguished scientific circles.

" 'The elaborate equipment and valuable scientific instruments costing many thousands of pounds are housed in the aerodrome, and so closely are they guarded that even Major Topham must give the password before entering the surrounding grounds and flying-field.

" 'There will be an opening ceremony on Monday afternoon at 3 o'clock for the public to see for the first time the huge gleaming rocket which will soar its way into the stratosphere. Major Topham will deliver his speech at 3.30, when he will explain the object and hopes of his expedition, the greatest in history.

" 'Major Topham will be accompanied on his flight by Professor Gavin Erdleigh, the well-known scientist; Doctor Malcolm Hobbes, botanist; Mr. B. A. Cooke, mineralogist; and Sergeant F. Hodson, "the strong man of the party".

" 'Major Topham intends to send an experimental

rocket, an exact replica of the "Luna", to precede the principal flight. He has made an appeal for a cat and dog to be lent to him for this preliminary experiment, and he has already had hundreds of applicants. . . .' "

Mr. Ridley threw down the newspaper.

"Then of course follows a whole lot of technical stuff," he said. "But of all the nonsense, and lies. 'Principal topic', indeed. Why, one half of us didn't believe a word of it, and the other half has been too disgusted with Topham and his vulgarity to take the slightest interest. And the men who count on the expedition are just mentioned casually.

"Erdleigh, Hobbes, Cooke–all brilliant men in their different ways–just thrown in at the end, and the poor wretched Sergeant who'll do all the dirty work referred to merely as 'the strong man of the party'. And you see I was right about his appeal for animals. 'Hundreds of applicants'! Up till last night there hadn't been one. I met old Scubby on his way from Topham's place after dosing young Cyril, who'd been over-eating again, and he told me all about it. There had not been one application, but Major Topham was feeling 'confident'. 'Confident!' "

Mr. Ridley took a long drink of coffee and reached for his egg.

Martin had kept his eyes fixed on his porridge-bowl while his father had been reading. He could feel his heart thumping against his ribs as he wondered how he was going to say the thing that would throw the whole family into an uproar. He had not realised how difficult it would be: there would be such strong opposition. He wished now that he had taken Jane into his confidence last night, for he would need an ally before the end of

breakfast. He gave his egg a brisk tap and set his teeth. It was now or never.

"Father," he began in a rather unnatural voice, "I'm going to offer Scruff and Tessie for the experimental rocket."

It was out at last. He took a deep breath and waited for the avalanche that was to follow.

His mother gave a little scream.

"Martin!" she said in a horrified voice. "Martin, what on earth do you mean?"

His father paused with a spoonful of egg half-way to his mouth.

"Have you lost your senses?" he asked.

Jane looked at him speechlessly, round-eyed and open-mouthed.

Martin went on eating his egg. It was no use weakening now–three against one, when the three are your own family are vast odds, and it would take him all his time and strength to win. But win he would.

"But, Martin," his mother began, "what a dreadful thing to say! That dear cat and dog. We've had them since they were a few weeks old; they are part of the family now. And to think of sending them to their death in that dreadful rocket. You can't realise what you're saying!" She took out her handkerchief and dabbed her eyes. "Of course we wouldn't let you do anything of the kind."

Jane fumbled up her sleeve and in her belt unsuccessfully for her handkerchief, and then used the back of her hand.

"You horrid, wicked boy," she sniffed. "Poor Scruffy!" She dashed from the table and caught Scruffy up in her arms. "You shan't do anything to him." She ran to her mother. "Don't let him, Mother; he's a bad wicked boy."

She began to cry noisily on her mother's shoulder.

"For Heaven's sake stop crying," her father said impatiently. "Isn't it bad enough to have one member of the family take leave of his senses?"

Jane lifted up her head.

"Look at him; he just goes on eating his egg as if nothing's happened. He's heartless and cruel."

She began to cry again.

"Jane," said her father sharply, "go back to the table and finish your breakfast, and stop crying at once." He turned to his wife. "I'll deal with this, dear."

Martin kept his eyes fixed on his empty eggshell, scratching at it inside with his spoon. His father folded his arms on the table and looked across at him.

"When did you first think of this?" he asked Martin.

"Yesterday," Martin answered sullenly.

"I see." His father paused. "You've been thinking of it all night, then?"

"Off and on," Martin muttered.

He raised his head. The two pairs of light grey eyes met steadily across the table for a few moments.

Mr. Ridley pushed back his chair.

"Martin must do as he thinks best with his own dog," he said quietly. "Whatever the consequences may be, he must learn them for himself."

"If Martin can do what he likes with his dog, I can with my cat," Jane burst out hotly. "He shan't have her."

Martin kicked her sharply on the ankle under the table. She stared at him, but lapsed into silence. What was he up to? she thought. He was behaving in a very odd way. He was always so kind to Scruff and Tessie, and loved them. Now he wanted to kill them. She blew her nose on her father's handkerchief and went on staring at her brother.

"Thank you, Father," was all Martin said.

"Jane, dear," said her mother, "do eat some breakfast."

Jane shook her head.

"I can't, Mother. I feel sick," she answered, and looked the picture of misery.

They all got up from the table. Mrs. Ridley looked indignantly at her husband and Martin and put her arms round Jane. Martin wandered to the door. It was Saturday; and Saturday mornings he and Jane roamed about the woods, and sometimes took their lunch with them, returning in time for high tea. He fiddled with the doorknob: he wanted to talk to Jane more than he had ever done in his life.

"Coming for a walk, Jane?" he asked in a rather subdued voice.

Jane shook her head.

This was awful; he'd have to manage it somehow.

"Come along, Jane," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry." He slid his arm round her neck. "I'm sorry," he repeated. He was always sorry after they had had one of their many quarrels.

This was more than the tender-hearted Jane could resist. She gave him a rather watery smile.

"All right," she answered, "I'll come."

Their father watched the two figures, both exactly the same height, getting smaller in the distance, on their way to the woods, with Scruff at their heels.

They both tramped along without speaking for some way: it was very difficult to start any kind of conversation. Martin dug his hands in his pockets and whistled through his teeth, Jane twitched loose twigs from the hedge. The only one who was completely unconcerned was Scruff, who darted and wriggled his way under

bushes in search of rabbit-holes. He always seemed to have so many things to do and such a short day to do them in. Jane caught the hem of her skirt in a blackberry bush as she climbed the stile leading to the forked road. It was a great relief; because it gave them something to talk about, and Jane could tease Martin gently about his clumsy fingers.

"Let's go up here." Martin pointed to the left branch of the road. "We can cross the stream then, and it's quieter over there. Saturday there's always people walking about."

He led the way down the bank and jumped to a fallen log in mid-stream. Jane looked for a log or stone within reach.

"Here!" called Martin. "Jump to this big stone and give me your hand. You can easily reach this log from there, and then jump to the bank."

He leaned over and caught her hand as she jumped to the stone and then to the log. They stood trying to get their balance, and then leapt one after the other across the fast-running little stream to the opposite side.

Scruff was darting about looking for them on the road until he heard Martin's whistle; then he came bounding through the water to their side, shaking himself and sneezing, and at once commenced his life's work of rabbit-hunting. The smells were better on this side of the stream, as few people bothered to cross it, and in the evening hundreds of rabbits would creep out from their holes, their little white tails bobbing about like puff balls in the wind. This place was Scruff's Paradise.

Martin and Jane climbed up the rough bank, strewn with fallen logs and broken branches, towards a clump of willows, the long, overhanging branches trailing in the clear water of the stream, making gentle swishing noises

as the water ran rapidly over the stones. This was one of their favourite Saturday morning walks.

Martin threw himself flat on his back, with his hands clasped behind his head, and watched the ragged patches of blue sky through the gaps in the branches. Jane sat bolt upright, pulling nervously at tufts of grass. She was beginning to feel utterly wretched again as she watched Scruff, the front half of him buried in the soft earth, and showers of stones, sticks and dirt flying round him as he dug himself a new hole.

"Did you really mean what you said at breakfast, Martin?" she asked in a trembling voice. "About Scruff, and–and sending him off in that awful rocket to the moon."

"Um," grunted Martin, closing his eyes thankfully; he had been wondering how to begin the subject.

Jane leant on her elbow, looking down at him.

"But, Martin, what's the matter with you? You're not a horrid cruel boy like George Brocket, or a silly conceited one like Cyril Topham. Why are you going to do it?"

She wrinkled her forehead and looked wonderingly at him.

"Oh." He paused. "So that Scruff can find a new kind of rabbit on the moon."

Things were going quite well, and he could afford to tease her a little. Jane in a temper or tears was more than he could manage; but Jane talking seriously and asking questions was another matter.

"But don't you love Scruff any more? Don't you realise we'll never see him again? Never go for walks with him, never hear him barking, never . . ."

It was time to put a stop to this.

"Oh, yes, we will," he answered quietly. "All of those things."

"But how can we? He'll be on the moon."

Her voice ended in a wail.

"So will we," Martin said, and suddenly sat up.

Jane gazed at him, shaking her head slowly in bewilderment. Perhaps his father was right–Martin had taken leave of his senses. He didn't look mad, of course, but he was acting strangely and saying wild things: first Scruff was going to the moon, and now they were. She put out her hand timidly and touched his coat sleeve.

"Do you feel all right, Martin?" she asked anxiously.

He looked at her and grinned; it was a very cheerful grin.

"Of course I feel all right." He became serious again. "When I said we would be with Scruff, I meant it. We're going to the moon, Jane–you, Scruff, Tessie and I. We're all going. And pretty quickly, too."

"You mean we're all going with Major Topham in that rocket?"

Jane looked more bewildered than ever. Now she was certain he was mad.

"Old Topham?" Martin roared with laughter. "No. We're going first–in the experimental rocket. Did you really think I meant to send dear old Scruffy and Tessie to the moon all alone shut up in a rocket and not be able to get out? We'll have to take them: it's our only chance of going. I've thought it all out–at least, almost all: just one or two things to talk about to you, that's all."

"But no one would let us go. Major Topham wants a dog and a cat; not a boy and a girl. Anyway, Mother and Father wouldn't let us. Don't be so silly, Martin," she answered scornfully.

Martin cocked an eye at her. He didn't want to start another row just at the moment.

"Remember old Uncle Bill?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do," Jane answered.

"You remember he went to Mexico when he was fourteen, with no money; nothing. Well, how did he do it?"

Martin looked steadily at her.

"Oh, he was a stowaway; and someone went to Mexico and brought him back," she answered.

"Well, that's what we're going to do. And somebody will have to fetch us back. Topham in the 'Luna'." Martin absent-mindedly scratched his leg. "When I think of Cyril Topham's face when he knows I've gone off in his father's rocket!"

He rolled over on his back and laughed until he had to let his belt out one more hole. The picture of Cyril's stupid white face was too much for Martin.

"But, seriously, Martin," Jane said, "we'd never be able to do it. What about Father and Mother? They'd never let us; and if we went without telling them think how they'd worry when we didn't come home."

She was beginning to bully him.

Martin whistled through his teeth for a moment.

"Mother would worry, of course, if she knew we'd gone. Father would think it was the kind of thing that was bound to happen one day. But all the same we can't tell them." He turned to Jane. "First, do you want to come? I mean you're not scared or anything? Because if you don't want to come, I won't tell you any more about it. Then you won't be able to answer so many questions. But I've always told you that you would be my storekeeper, and I mean it. Do you want to come?" he asked her anxiously.

Jane nodded her head.

"Yes, of course I want to; do you think I'd let you go alone? I do want to." She looked worried. "But it's Father and Mother. We don't want to worry them."

"Leave that to me," Martin answered. "I'll think of a way out. I spent all last night in the mill thinking of every little detail. I'll find a way out of this, don't worry, as long as you want to come."

Jane nodded her head again and stared at her shoes.

"I can see lots of snags," she said. "But of course *you* can't."

"I could about midnight last night; but not so many at three o'clock this morning," he answered.

Jane glanced at him.

"Did you stay up all night?" she asked.

"Yes," Martin answered, "in the mill. I went for a swim as soon as it was daybreak."

"In that filthy muddy pond? Ugh!" She shuddered. "You *are* a dirty little pig, Martin."

"It's all right; it's very deep in parts. Anyway, it was good early this morning, and I was too excited to sleep. Now I've a lot to talk about. The flying-field is to be opened on Monday. That means they'll probably take off on Wednesday night. We might get a half-holiday on Monday to go to the opening, but we might not. That only gives us to-day and to-morrow clear to collect stores and arrange everything. Professor Erdleigh said he would explain how the 'Luna' worked on Monday; but you've got to pretend you want to know how the 'Luna I' works because your cat's going in it, see? I can't say it, but you can. I'll be with you. Listen to everything you can, but I'll ask the questions. That's Monday. On Tuesday the rocket will still be on view, and I'll go down again to the aerodrome and poke around and learn what I can. Wednesday, of course, we'll take Scruff and Tessie down to the flying-field. That's the rough plan. Now for details. The stores I'll leave to you. Cook won't let me in the kitchen a moment; as soon as I go in she says, 'If you

want a piece of cake I'll cut it for you'. That's a lot of use when we want to collect all we can. But she'll let you go in as much as you like. To-morrow we'll say we want to go for a picnic. We'll save as much of the food as we can and hide it in the mill: we can make up for it at tea." He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and a stub of pencil. "Let's see. Remember there's no water on the moon, so we'll have to take quite a lot to drink; and we'll probably get thirstier than we do here. It's frightfully cold. We can smuggle out the old car rug: we can't take blankets because Ethel will know when she makes the beds."

He sat wondering.

"Yes, we can," said Jane. "We can take the brown army blanket off your bed just before we start, and say we want to wrap the animals up in it."

"That's fine! Yes, we'll do that." He made another tick on his list. "Do you know where Mother keeps our winter jerseys?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll get them. And we'd better wear our thickest shoes, as we'll only have one pair."

Her interest now was as great as Martin's, and her temper was improving.

"It's hot, of course, too–blazing hot. We can take off some of our clothes; that's all right. But the glare from the sun is tremendous–blinding. I think we ought to take dark spectacles. I know where Father's are–they're in the greenhouse. He never uses them, so he won't miss them. Where are Mother's?" Martin asked.

"I don't know; but I know where her tennis eye-shade is," she said.

"That'll do." He made another tick. "And as much food as you can find. But be careful that they don't miss it –you know what cook's like. Some of those jars of meat

extract would be useful–you always take that stuff with you on expeditions."

Martin tapped his teeth with his pencil.

"If there's no water on the moon, how can we use the extract?" asked Jane.

"Eat it as it is," answered Martin, still tapping his teeth. "How much pocket money have you got left?"

Jane considered for a moment.

"Three and fourpence," she said.

"I've got over five shillings. I was saving up for Ross's 'Voyage of Discovery', but that must wait. We'll get as much chocolate as we can–we'll divide the money between chocolate and films for my camera. I don't think for a moment we'll be able to take any photographs, but it would be maddening to get there and find we could have taken them and that we had no films. We'd better take note-books of some kind, as we'll want to make notes. We can put specimens of things we find in envelopes." He scribbled something else down on his list. "Garden trowel," he added, "might be useful." He read through the list and folded it up. "I'll keep this until the afternoon, in case I think of anything else, and then give it to you. The things marked with a tick are the things you'll have to pack. I'll do the others. You see, they are sending the rocket off more or less empty–just the ordinary fittings and things–and making up the weight of passengers, stores, and instruments with ballast, so we'll have to take as much as we can."

He sat and scratched a gnat-bite in silence, and stared into the water.

"I wonder how long we'll stay there," said Jane, rubbing Scruff's neck, who had pushed his head in between them.

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"Till old Topham comes to fetch us," he answered. "How mad he'll be!" Martin laughed. "Now about packing all this stuff. Our school-bags, of course, will hold a lot. Father's rucksack and, if possible, one of cook's rush baskets. We'll hide the things a bit at a time in the nettles by the mill stream. There are lots of overhanging bushes; no one will find them."

"I want to know how we're going to get in the rocket without being seen," said the practical Jane.

"Ah, that's what I'll have to find out on Monday; but everything is going so well that there must be a way. The greatest trouble that I can see is how we are going to tell Father and Mother that you are going to send Tessie in the rocket. You made such a silly fuss at breakfast that it's going to be difficult."

Martin scowled at her.

"Oh, that's all right," answered Jane serenely. "I'll say you've talked me round, and then explain that Major Topham will bring them back with him when he goes on the real flight."

"Well, you'll have to do it; you messed things up to start with," said Martin sulkily.

"Oh, Martin! That's not fair," pleaded Jane. "I didn't understand what you were doing; you're so mean sometimes, and don't tell me anything. I do understand now, and I want to go, and I want to help all I can."

Martin reached over and made a face at her.

"You silly owl!" he said. "You're the best person anyone could have on an expedition; and you've had lots of good ideas about the things we should take and how we'll get them. Imagine, Jane. We'll be the first people on the moon; we'll discover it, and name mountains and valleys and plains–'Plain Jane'."

He laughed loudly and pointed his finger at her.

Jane snatched at his hair and grabbed a handful. The more he yelled the more Scruff barked: he loved noise.

Martin rubbed his sore scalp and glanced across the stream.

A boy was walking slowly down the road leading from the village. He carefully unlatched the gate and walked through, re-latching it after him. His shirt was spotless, and the only creases in his tight grey flannel knickers were the knife creases down the front of his fat legs. No one ever saw him with his socks hanging over his ankles, and his school tie (he put on a fresh one every day) was always carefully knotted. He liked clothes almost as much as he did food. The sun glittered on his polished shoes as he stopped, a little out of breath, to mop his white, pasty face with a handkerchief as snowy as his shirt.

"Look," said Martin, pointing across the stream. "Cyril!"

Jane began to scramble to her feet.

"Let's hide," she said quickly. "We don't want him to see us–the horrid, sly bully."

Martin pulled her skirt.

"Sit down," he muttered under his breath. "He might know something. Hi! Cyril," he shouted across the water.

Cyril stood with his mouth half open, looking in the wrong direction. Martin made a cup of his hands and shouted again.

"No, this way, you loon."

Cyril caught sight of them. He knew they went for picnics on Saturdays, and although he didn't like either Jane or Martin, his face brightened as he looked hastily for any sign of a lunch-box–even a paper bag would have cheered him up. He hesitated a moment. After all, there was always the chance of a piece of toffee or a chocolate.

"Come over here," shouted Martin.

"No," Cyril called back; "you come over here."

He hated crossing streams–he hated anything that was stronger than he was.

"Frightened of the water?" Martin shouted.

Jane laughed and Scruff barked.

The thought that there might be a picnic made Cyril walk slowly to the edge of the stream.

"Here." Martin directed from the opposite bank. "Step on that big grey stone. No! the one by your left foot–that's right. Now jump to that log. Go on, you can reach it."

"Which one?" Cyril called in a nervous voice.

"That one." Martin pointed to it. "No, *that* one."

He threw a stone and hit the log. Cyril and Scruff landed on the log at the same moment. Scruff could never resist a stone, and darted between Cyril's legs to retrieve it from the water. Up went Cyril's fat legs, and with a tremendous splash he sat down on the bed of the stream. Jane ran down the bank to help him up. She didn't like him, but she was a kind girl, and even Cyril in trouble touched her heart.

"Oh, poor Cyril!" she cried sympathetically. "Martin, take his other hand and pull."

They hauled the dripping boy out of the water.

"Lie in the sun; you'll soon dry," said Martin heartlessly. "I've fallen in that stream dozens of times before I found the right stones to jump to."

"It was your beastly dog," Cyril said angrily–he didn't care much for dogs. "He attacked me," he added after a pause.

Jane saw Martin's eyes narrow into slits and his hands clench as he walked slowly towards Cyril. She hastily pulled Cyril down beside her.

"There, Cyril," she said soothingly, "you sit here and get dry."

She frowned at Martin and made a sign towards the sky. Martin grinned and understood.

"How's the rocket, Cyril?" he asked, sitting astride a fallen tree.

Cyril almost forgot his soaking clothes and smirked.

"*Our* rocket, you mean," he answered. "Oh, it's nearly assembled now. I was down there this morning," he added carelessly.

Martin looked steadily at him.

"Do you know Professor Erdleigh well?" he asked Cyril.

"Yes," Cyril answered. "Father employed him to make the 'Luna', you know. He seems quite a decent sort of man. I get on very well with him; he has quite an amount of knowledge."

Cyril was adopting his father's pompous voice. Martin chuckled.

"Yes," he said, "the Professor was telling me a bit about you the other day."

Cyril's face went a dull brick red: he knew the Professor loathed the sight of him.

"I didn't know you knew him," he muttered.

"Oh yes, I know him. Are we going to have a half-holiday from school on Monday for the opening of the flying-field?" Martin asked.

Cyril smiled smugly.

"That is a secret; but *I* know," he answered. "Anyway, you'll all be able to hear Father's speech; and of course see the rocket."

"Have you seen it yet?" Jane asked Cyril.

He hadn't, and didn't like to say he had, for fear of what Professor Erdleigh had told Martin. He looked mysterious.

"That's telling," he answered. "I've got to be very careful what I say: we don't want any secrets leaking out."

He frowned importantly.

"When's the experimental rocket going up?" asked Martin.

"Tuesday night," answered Cyril, without a moment's hesitation.

"Well, there's one secret out, anyway," laughed Martin.

Cyril began to stammer.

"I-I-I-don't quite know. I-I-only said Tuesday as a guess: I really don't know."

He was getting worried, and turned his small brown eyes first to Jane, and then to Martin. Although he was a pampered, spoilt boy, his father never hesitated to use his slipper where it hurt most; and had threatened to do it more than once during the last few weeks when stories had come back to him about things Cyril had told the other boys at school. He would pretend to be ill, he thought, when he arrived home, and his mother would pet him. It seemed little use staying here, anyway; for there were no paper bags in sight, and he was beginning to shiver.

"Are you having a picnic?" he asked as a last hope.

"No," Martin answered; "but you can have a liquorice allsort if you like."

He fished a crumpled paper bag out of his trousers pocket; he didn't want Cyril to go home just yet.

Cyril's face lightened at the sight, and he took two allsorts and settled himself down to wait until the bag was empty. They all three sat without speaking for a few minutes. The sweets made Cyril feel much better, and some of his old boastfulness came back.

"I shall be on the platform with Father while he's

making his speech on Monday, of course," he said, still adopting his father's voice.

"Where will you be when the rocket is fired?" asked Martin. "Close by, I suppose."

"Oh yes," Cyril answered brightly. "I'll be just by the firing-ramp–there's a huge ramp, so high that you can't see anything the other side of it."

"If the rocket has to be fired, how are they coming back from the moon?" asked Jane. "I mean, who's going to fire it back again?"

"Oh, well, the first one–the 'Luna I'–will have to be fired because there won't be anyone in it to use the firing-switch; but the 'Luna'–the one Father's going in–will be started from inside."

Cyril didn't like all these questions; he was getting nervous and the allsorts were finished. He'd better be getting home, he thought, and lumbered to his feet. He had the choice of crossing the stream again or walking about two miles through the woods to get back to the road. Safety was Cyril's rule.

"Come on, Cyril," said Martin, winking at Jane. "I'll race you across the stream."

He was over on the opposite bank in two leaps.

Jane followed almost as quickly, with Scruff splashing at her heels. Cyril walked gingerly to the bank.

"Take your time, Cyril. You'll be all right when you get on the moon; there's no water there!" shouted Martin.

Cyril stood and watched them as they walked on down the road towards the wood.

"You are horrid to him, Martin," giggled Jane.

"You should see him sometimes at school–"

He broke off, and turned to look at the loitering Cyril over his shoulder.

"Well, we learnt a bit, anyway," remarked Martin when they were on the road home. "We know the 'Luna I' is off on Tuesday night and that there's a high firing-ramp; it might be useful to hide behind. You'd better go home and break the news about Tessie and start collecting some food and things. I'll walk down towards the aerodrome; I might meet the Professor. I wonder what he'll say when he knows we've gone off in his rocket?"

"I expect he'll be as angry as Major Topham," Jane answered.

"No, I don't think he'll be angry–he's not a bit like old Topham. Well, we'll know when we come back what they all feel about it." Martin threw a stone for Scruff. "Wonder if there'll be any stones for Scruff on the moon," he said.

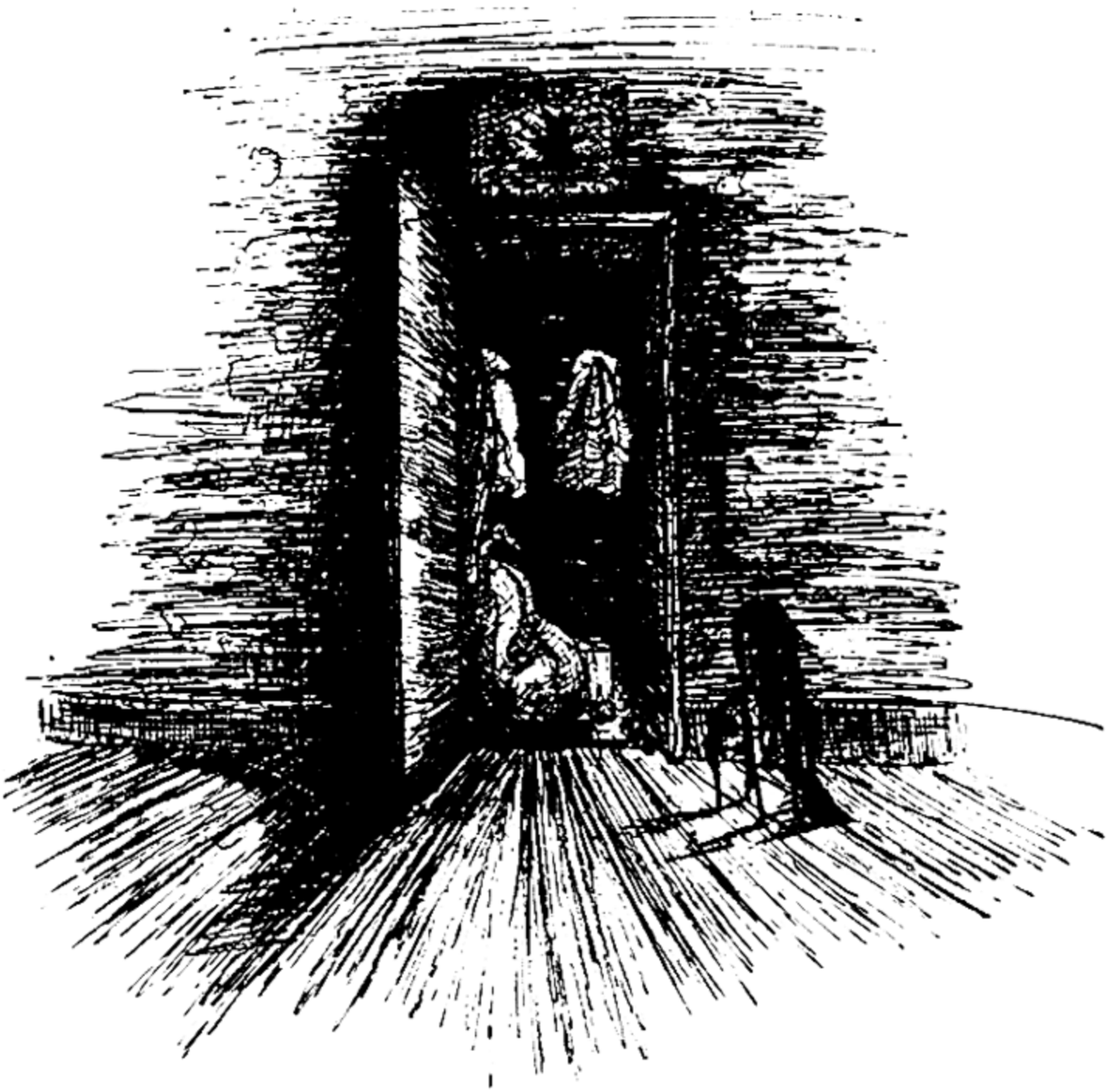
"Well, there won't be any trees for poor Tessie to climb," answered Jane.

"No; but think of all the cinders she'll be able to scratch up," laughed Martin.

He looked back and saw the plodding figure of Cyril disappearing round the bend of the road.

"We can turn back now," he told Jane. "There's lots to do before Monday."

They walked back to Mill House still planning the greatest adventure any boy and girl had ever known.



Chapter VI

GLOOM descended over the Ridley household all through the next day. As a rule Sundays were pleasant; with a picnic-basket and rugs packed in the back of the rather dilapidated car, the family would spend the whole day until tea-time exploring new places. Jane and her mother always sat together, and wondered if they had packed the salt for the hard-boiled eggs; although they were sure they had when they packed the basket, there was always the feeling of uneasiness until they had unpacked it in some shady spot. Martin would sit in front with his father, and sometimes, when they were in a quiet lane and policemen were far away,

he would let Martin drive the car. On Saturday afternoons at tea-time these excursions were always planned. But tea on Saturday this week-end had been a dreary affair: as soon as she arrived home from the morning's walk with Martin, Jane had announced her intention of sending Tessie in the rocket with Scruff. Her mother was angry with Martin for what she called "his heartless cruelty" in sending the animals to the moon, and with her husband for not forbidding it. Mr. Ridley refused to have anything to do with it, saying that the dog and cat were the children's own property, and that they were old enough to be responsible for them. She was not angry with Jane, because she was convinced that Jane was being influenced by Martin. Poor Jane, torn between hurting her mother and being disloyal to Martin, heartily wished she had never heard of the rocket. Altogether a more gloomy family it would have been very difficult to find on this Sunday afternoon; when the arguments were over the parents had a sense of defeat that spoiled the feeling of triumph for the children. Mrs. Ridley had retired to lie down after lunch, armed with a bottle of aspirin and smelling-salts, and Mr. Ridley wandered off into the garden to sweep up the early fall of leaves. The only bright spot in the day was that cook had taken the afternoon off, and as there would be cold supper, she would not return before the evening: this gave Jane the whole afternoon to collect her stores without interruption. Martin went off to his bedroom to make some adjustments to his telescope and to pack a few things that he thought they would need for the journey. After his packing he slid his telescope-case out of sight and sat on the side of his bed, resting his elbows on his knees and running his fingers through his hair. He was by no means insensible to the trouble he was causing, but there was

nothing he could do about it; he was helpless. When his father and mother knew that he had taken Jane as well as Scruff and Tessie with him, the mark against him would be blacker than ever. How thankful he was for Jane. He was feeling very tired, for he had had no sleep the night before, and the excitement of the last forty-eight hours, combined with arguments and opposition from the family, were beginning to react. He had a curious numb feeling and a dull headache. There were so many things to do, and nothing could be done until to-morrow afternoon. He sat twisting his hair and staring at the floor for some minutes. A 'plane in the distance was the only sound, and the scent of burning leaves came up sweet and heavy through his open window. He glanced out at the tree-tops, purple and dusky, like branches of grapes hanging upside down from the still afternoon sky.

His bedroom door opened slowly, and a well-filled sack appeared in the doorway, followed by Jane, who sat down heavily on the bed beside Martin, brushing the damp hair from her forehead.

"I couldn't put the things in the school bags because we'll want them in the morning, so I found this sack in the tool-shed. Where can we hide it till Tuesday night?" she asked Martin.

"In the cupboard for now, underneath my clothes," he answered; "and to-night I'll take it down to the mill."

"We can't leave it there all day Monday and Tuesday," Jane said.

"Of course we can," Martin answered impatiently. "Who's going to poke about in all those nettles? You're always trying to make difficulties. Anyway, everyone will be down at the aerodrome. You'd better come down to the mill with me and help pack the stuff Tuesday evening."

Jane put her head out of the window and looked out.

"I saw Father just before I came up here; he asked where you were, and wanted you to go down and help him clear up the leaves," Jane told him.

Martin looked at her over his shoulder.

"Is he still angry?" he inquired.

"No," she answered, "he's just the same as he always is. But Mother is still lying down. I'm afraid we've caused them an awful lot of worry, Martin." She looked at him seriously as he set his mouth in a straight line. "It's all very well to look like that; you know we have. I don't believe you care one bit."

Martin turned his back quickly and leaned out of the window. Of course he did, but he couldn't go back on his decision now.

"I'm going down to help Father," he said gruffly, and clattered down the stairs into the garden. "Do you want me to lend a hand, Father?" he called out.

His father peered at him through the blue, curling smoke of the bonfire.

"Yes, unless you want to do anything else," his father answered. "We must get these leaves cleared up before the rain comes, or they'll never burn."

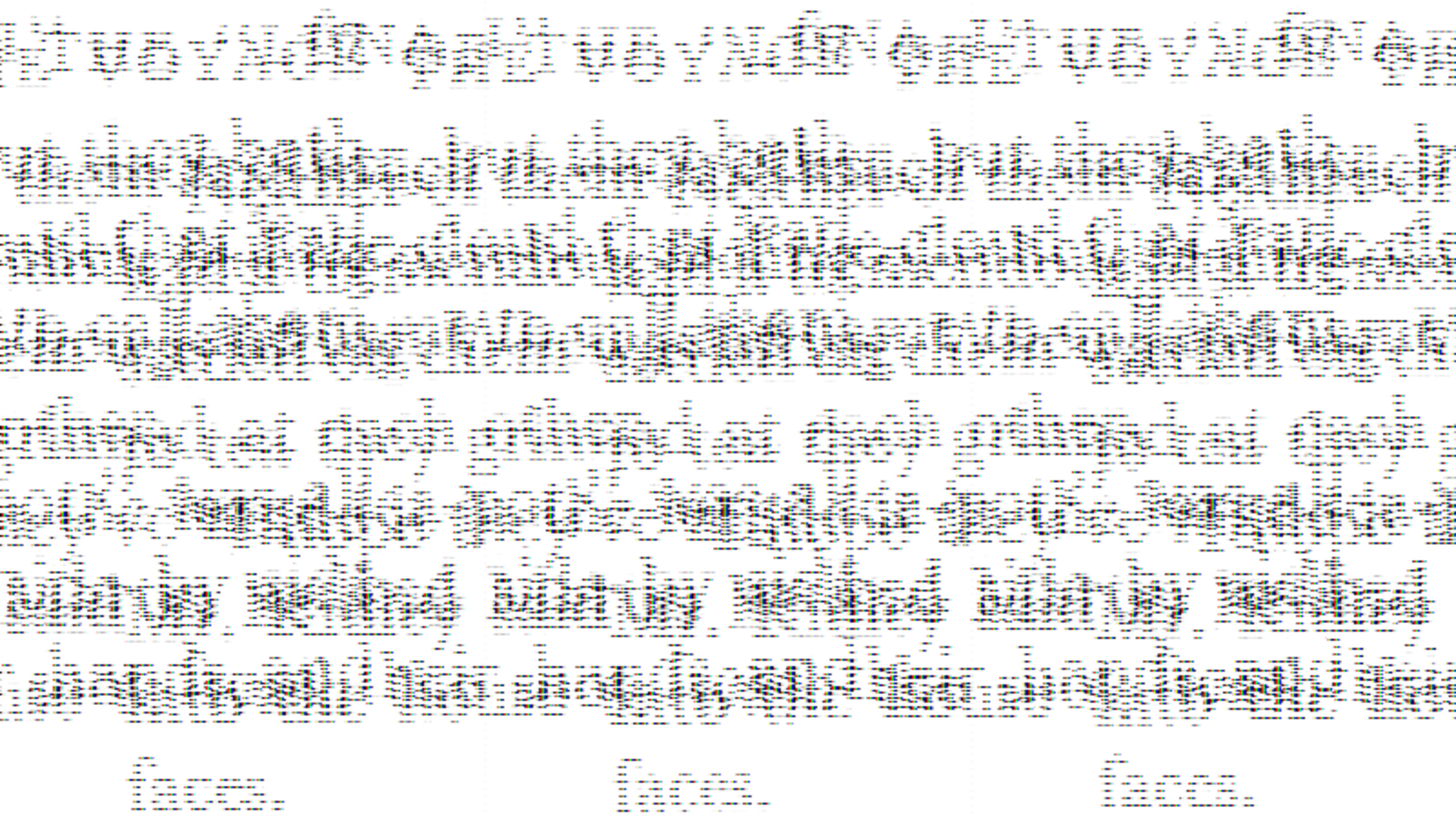
Martin looked up anxiously at the sky, his heart missing a beat.

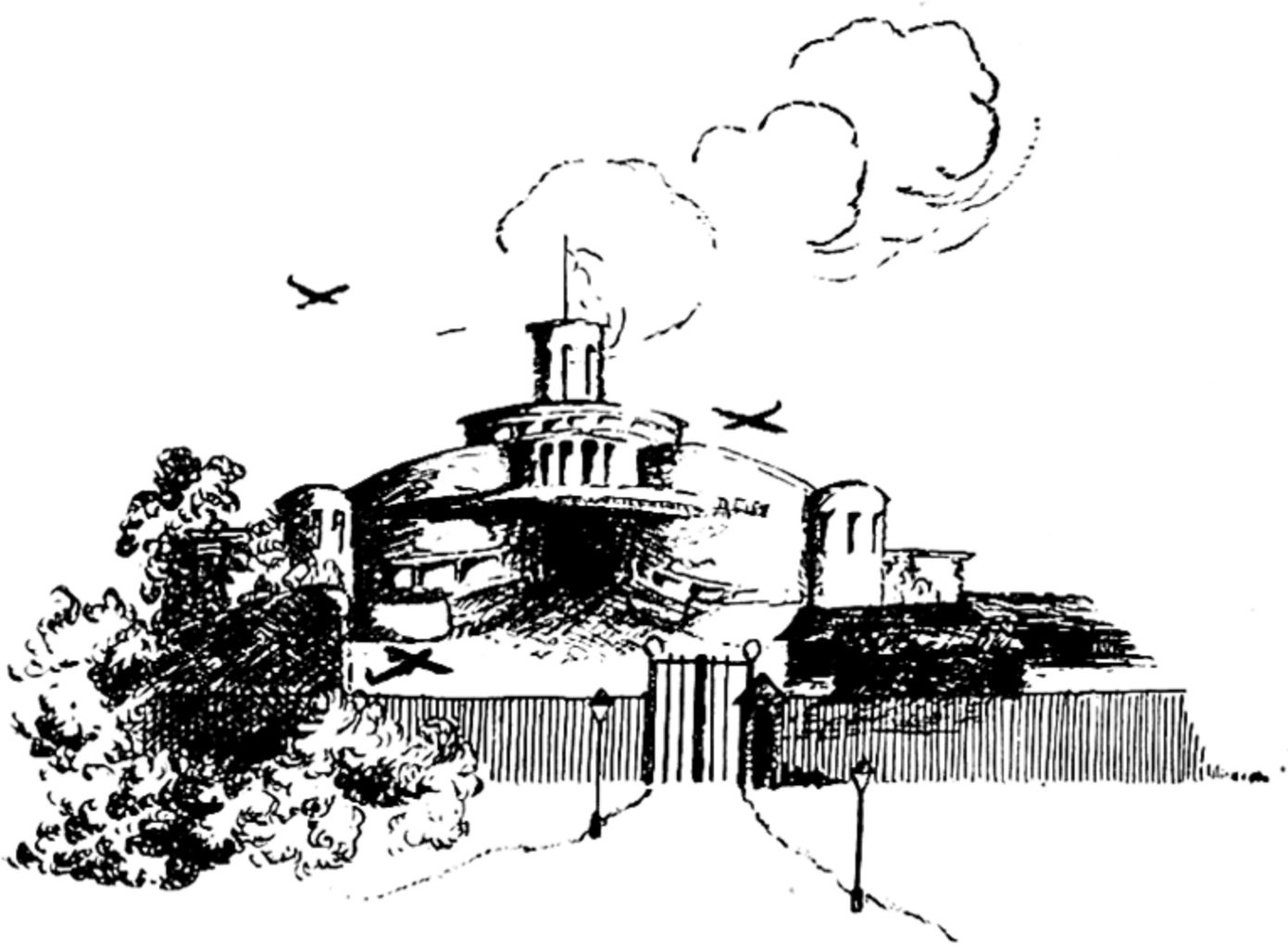
"Rain?" he asked. "Do you think it's going to rain?"

His father glanced round the sky.

"No, not for a day or two; but the wind's changing, and we've had a long dry spell: that's the cause of this early fall of leaves. I'll be glad when they're all down." He poked at the fire. "Makes such a mess," he grumbled.

Martin took the garden broom and began to sweep the golden beech-leaves towards his father, who raked them on the fire.





Chapter VII

An enormous crowd had gathered at the aerodrome gates long before the opening time on Monday afternoon: the line of cars stretched for about a quarter of a mile along the road; for people had driven in from all over the country for their first view of the shining monster which was to soar its way to undiscovered heights and to another planet. The strains of the Royal Air Force band playing their Regimental March mingled with the voices of the crowd and the hooting of cars. Now and then someone would start to cheer and clap their hands. Small boys from the village climbed up the fence surrounding the flying-field to have a pre-view, and were instantly hauled down by a policeman. The village boasted only one constable, so several had been borrowed from the neighbouring market town to direct the traffic and to keep their eyes on the gate-crashers. The crowd parted to let a huge catering-van through, which was greeted with loud

cheers, for the afternoon was hot and dusty, and after a long wait outside the gates everyone felt that tea and cakes would be very welcome. Although Major Topham was by no means a popular man in the village, and there was a great deal of bad feeling regarding the rocket, especially among the older people, who preferred to have their feet on solid ground instead of dangling in the stratosphere, almost everyone was eager to see this triumph of engineering and science. It was always referred to as "Topham's Rocket", much to the secret amusement of Professor Erdleigh.

"After all, I only invented the thing: Topham's paid for it," he chuckled into his little black beard.

Suddenly the policemen started pushing the crowd back, shouting, "Make way there", and "Stand back".

The people parted to let a long grey car through, the Rolls engine purring gently as it drove slowly down the road, the crowd cheered as the big, hatless man inside waved his hand. He leaned towards the window, blocking out the sturdy figure with its upturned beard who sat beside him.

"Three cheers for Topham!" yelled the crowd.

The noise was deafening.

The big, hatless man turned to the rather untidy one beside him.

"Erdleigh," he said pompously, "this is a great moment."

The Professor wiped his forehead with a crumpled handkerchief.

"A great nuisance, Topham," he corrected. "I hate crowds."

"Nonsense," answered Major Topham. "We owe it to our public. We'll be the first men on the moon."

He turned once more to the window to wave to "his public".

The gates swung open and the car disappeared, leaving the people outside still cheering. It was five minutes to three. There was another stir as a second car containing Mrs. Topham and Cyril made its way slowly through the crowd. Cyril pushed his way in front of his mother and waved through the window. A feeble cheer came from the back of the crowd. One small urchin shouted, "Any old iron", and had his ears boxed by his mother, who felt if you did not like the gentry, you should respect them.

Two policemen posted themselves on each side of the entrance to the flying-field and stood chatting with the ground-staff men and glancing towards the big aerodrome clock. It was one minute to three o'clock.

One, two, three, the clock slowly struck the hour. At the first note the crowd surged through the gates and spread over the field like incoming waves on the sea-shore. The sun, shining down from the cloudless sky, caught the huge object in the centre of the field in its rays. The people had their first sight of the "Luna".

The Professor had described the "Luna" as a "kind shark". It is true it had a shark-like appearance; but with huge wings, and constructed of a metal unlike anything anyone had seen before. It was something the colour of gun-metal, only lighter, and shone with a soft brilliance, the sun making the high lights pearly silver and the shadows the tone of a gun-barrel. The size was immense, and stretched half-way across the field; but, for all the "Luna's" size and power, she seemed to rest lightly on the ground, barely touching it, as if she had perched there for a second before flying off again somewhere else.

The band had stopped playing, and people were beginning to move towards the raised platform, surrounded

with loud-speakers and draped in the Union Jack. Major Topham was almost due to make his speech. He was talking to a little group of newspaper reporters, who were all busy scribbling in note-books and asking questions. Cyril was standing beside him, his fat white face glistening in the sun, and ready to leap on the platform beside his father.

Martin and Jane had been two of the first people to break through the barrier to the flying-field. They made their way in and out of the crowd to the "Luna". They stayed by the ropes that shut the rocket off from the public until the crowd cleared a little, for they had no wish to hear Major Topham's speech; but to find the Professor was a matter of great importance.

On the way to school that morning they had called at Major Topham's house and told him they were willing to offer their pets for the "Lunar" flight. Although he pretended that he had had hundreds of applicants, in truth no one until that morning had volunteered even to let him have one of the fleas off their dogs. He overwhelmed Martin and Jane with thanks, saying that most of the applicants were people outside the village, but he much preferred to have "local" animals! And of course he would make special reference to their public spirit in his speech that afternoon.

Martin wondered what he would think of their public spirit in a few hours time, and who would be the first one to break the news to him of their stowaway flight. The morning in school had dragged slowly along, but a half-holiday had been granted, and the general excitement, which had been rather damped by the week-end, was returning. They stood looking in all directions for the stocky, bearded figure of the Professor.

One of the window-shutters of the "Luna's" passenger

cabin opened and a cigarette end came flying out; then a black, pointed beard appeared.

"There he is," whispered Jane–"in the rocket."

The beard disappeared, and after a few minutes out crawled the Professor from underneath the "Luna". He came towards them.

"Hello!" he grinned. "I've been sitting comfortably in one of the hammocks smoking for about half an hour. It's so silent in there that I nearly dozed off once!" He put a hand on Jane's shoulder. "So this is Jane." He looked down and smiled. "I've never seen twins who looked so different. Aren't you glad you have pretty brown curls instead of corn stubble like Martin?" he asked Jane.

Jane nodded, blushing to the top of her forehead. She liked him already.

The Professor looked round at the crowd of sightseers sweeping towards Major Topham's rostrum. Major Topham was climbing up to the platform. His wife had already settled herself on one of the three chairs, and was half hidden by a large bouquet of flowers which the vicar's small daughter had presented to her: as Doctor Scubby remarked sourly, no doubt paid for by Topham!

"Listen," said the Professor. "Let's escape. I'll show you over the 'Luna', but we'll go in at the front door. I came out of the back entrance."

He led the way to the long steel ladder leading to the door of the passenger cabin.

"Which is the 'Luna I'?" asked Jane. "Can we see that one, too, because, you see, Tessie and Scruff are going in it."

The Professor bent down and whispered to her:

"This is the 'Luna I'. The 'Luna' is still in her shed. There are some adjustments to make, and as the 'Luna I'

is exactly the same, the people will not be disappointed. I'll go first and open up the house."

He ran up the long ladder like a sailor up the rigging of a ship and pressed a tiny knob. The curved cabin door swung open, and he stepped inside, holding out his hand to help Jane, who was climbing up slowly, careful not to look down to the ground.

"What a terrific height it is from the ground!" she said when she was safely standing on the floor of the passenger cabin.

"Height?" laughed the Professor. "What would you say if you were on the moon?"

Jane blushed again, this time rather guiltily, and glanced at Martin as he scrambled through the door.

The two potential stowaways looked round at the passenger cabin in amazement. Jane gave a long-drawn-out "Oh", and touched the softly padded, blue leather walls.

The Professor nodded and laughed.

"Oh yes, it's soft and pretty, too, eh?" he said. "When I travel to the moon it's going to be in comfort! And, look, nice soft beds." He bounced about on the spring hammocks. "No lumps."

Martin prodded the leather walls with his finger.

"How will this leather stand up to the changes in atmosphere?" he asked.

"In the same way that we will: oxygen." The Professor pointed to the oxygen tubes fitted over each hammock. "These tubes will have oxygen pumped into them during the whole journey, which will enable us to breathe: it will purify the air of carbon dioxide–a few mouthfuls of that would soon poison you."

"Let's explore every part of the 'Luna'," Jane broke in, anxious to gather all the information she could.

"Well, my impatient Jane," laughed the Professor, "we will not have time to explore everything." He glanced at his watch. "I'm afraid it will mean a very rapid glance at most. Major Topham has been speaking for several minutes already, and we want to be clear of the 'Luna I' by the time he arrives with all his friends. However, we'll see as much as we can. Now, these locker-chests."

He touched the lid of one of the deep chests set by each hammock and lifted the lid. Martin peered inside. It was like a sea-chest–only padded, as the walls were, with leather, and deep enough for a small man to crouch in.

"Will they be empty during the voyage?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound casual.

"Some of them will be; those in the far corner will be filled with ballast sand to correspond with the passenger weight and equipment that we will carry in the second rocket. Tessie and Scruff will, of course, occupy one. I am going to have holes bored in the lid, so they will get a little light; darkness all through their long journey would be most miserable for them. But the chests on this side will, I expect, be empty."

Martin gently breathed his relief. Here was one problem solved.

"What are these for?" Jane asked, touching one of the small tanks fitted to the hammock heads, each one had a tube about two yards long attached to it.

"Oh, those are the drinking-tanks. When we are in space we shall have to drink like babies." He put one of the tubes in his mouth and drew up some of the distilled water and gulped. "And those cylinders are full of food tablets."

He took up a small metal cylinder and shook a few brown tablets out into his hand.

"Why can't you eat and drink in the ordinary way?" Jane asked him.

"This will be the 'ordinary way' on the journey we are taking," the Professor told her. "We are only familiar with things as they normally behave on earth, with gravity holding everything down in its proper place; but when we are clear of the earth it will be a very different story. Water will be drawn up from tumblers and food off plates; and we would float up to the ceiling if we were not strapped to our hammocks."

He showed them the thick straps fitted to each hammock.

"Why?" asked Jane inquisitively.

Martin gave her a gentle kick: there was a lot of time being wasted.

"Will you have to be strapped in all the way?" he asked.

"Possibly," answered the Professor; "but I have a feeling that the weightlessness will not last such a great while. Now, these masks," he went on, taking down one of the oxygen masks from its wall bracket. "We will have to use them when we get on the moon. I have none of our equipment here to show you, but these masks are one of the most vital parts."

While the Professor was showing Jane how the mask fitted and was explaining the working of the oxygen cylinders attached to it, Martin was roaming round the cabin making mental notes of things that he wanted to ask the Professor later. Major Topham was drawing near the end of his speech, and so far they had learnt very little about the working of the rocket. Jane was doing very well, he noted with approval; she was certainly the right kind of person to go on an expedition with. He strolled over to them and pointed to a lever in the wall.

"Is this the starting lever?" he asked.

The Professor turned to see which he meant.

"No," he answered; "that is to open the parachute wings to break our fall when we arrive near the moon."

Martin nodded wisely. He had not the faintest idea why they would have to do this, but dared not ask too many questions. To his relief, the Professor took hold of the lever and showed him how it worked.

"Go to the window a moment, and I'll show you what I mean," the Professor told him.

Martin and Jane darted to the window, and saw one of the grey tips of the parachute wings slide from under the main wings.

"May I work it for a moment?" Martin asked in desperation.

Here was something he would have to learn unless he wanted to crash and add one more crater to the moon.

The Professor nodded.

"Just pull it gently to the red line. That's right! I shall have to take you as my pilot next time I fly to another planet! And talking of pilots, that's the pilot's seat." He pointed to a canvas seat with two straps fixed to the floor beneath it; rather like the foot-straps on skis. "The pilot will have to test the oxygen tubes, read aneroid barometers and chronometers, besides working the parachute wings; so it will mean keeping his feet well strapped to the floor, unless he wants to float around the ceiling."

Jane was kneeling on the floor examining a round, thick glass window set in the foot of the cabin.

"And that, Jane," said the Professor, "is the tradesmen's entrance: we bring in our supplies from there. That's where you saw me come out just now. No one can see you from the ground, as the wings slope over it. You just pull the handle, and down goes the lid!"

"I suppose when you get outside there's another little handle there?" she asked.

"I'll show you," the Professor answered. "Come along," and they both disappeared through the supply hatch.

Martin made good use of the next few minutes. He examined the locker-chests and the latches that locked the supply hatch and main cabin. The two main points had been settled–they could get in through the supply hatch and hide in the locker chests–but there were a thousand things he wanted to ask the Professor. However, things were going to be very much easier than he had expected, and if he had to take chances through knowing little of the mechanism of this strange craft–well, he had taken so many during the last few hours that he felt taking chances was the normal way of living. He heard Jane and the Professor clambering back into the cabin, and began whistling rather nervously through his teeth.

"Hot?" The Professor was saying in answer to Jane's question. "I should think the moon *is* hot. Whichever part of it is in the sunlight stays there, and gets baked and baked for a fortnight. Imagine the heat. The moon is nearer to the sun than we are, and is composed of volcanic ash which gets hotter and hotter, about 220° Fahrenheit. Directly under the sun it will be a great deal more than that. In fact the known figures are about 244° above Zero and 244° below Zero at its hottest and coldest."

Martin hardly listened to the Professor's words: he did not want to hear how he might freeze or burn, when there were so many important things to settle, but he could not interrupt.

"I suppose you could escape from the heat by finding shade from the mountains?" Jane asked.

"That's one of the things we don't know," answered the Professor. "I doubt very much whether I shall stay there for a 'Lunar day'. The ash that the moon is made up from is much the same as asbestos: it's a non-conductor of heat and cold. The moon has no heat of its own, so as soon as it turns its face from the sun it becomes instantly cold. A little way from the surface even in extreme heat would be at freezing point." He jumped up. "Oh, there's something else I must show you."

He hurried through a little slip door leading to the rocket's spearhead.

Martin sighed with relief at action, and leaned forward to Jane.

"Things are going very well," he whispered.

Jane nodded her head delightedly.

"There's a fuse set in the 'Luna's' spearhead," came the Professor's voice through the door. He climbed back into the cabin, holding some little grey pellets in his outstretched hand. "And when her nose touches ground these little flash pellets will explode–we hope," he added, with a laugh. "I always say 'we hope', for luck. The explosion will merely be a red flash of light, but enough to let us know the flight has been successful."

"And she is really going to start on Tuesday night," said Martin.

"How did you know?" asked the Professor quickly.

"Cyril!" cried Jane and Martin together.

The Professor screwed up his mouth.

"Cyril," he snapped in disgust. "Well, yes, the 'Luna I' will be off about nine o'clock, as far as we can judge by the weather. I think you'd better bring down your cat and dog about eight o'clock. We won't put them in until the last moment, of course. I'm afraid you won't be able to see the 'Luna I' fired though–no one will be on the

flying-field unless they are connected in some way with the working party–but I promise I'll let you know all about it before I start for Greenwich."

"Greenwich?" queried Martin.

"Yes. As soon as the 'Luna I' goes off to the moon, Major Topham and I go off to Greenwich; and then we will stay at the Observatory until we see the red flash." The sounds of cheering came through the open shutters of the rocket. "If you want to see the engines we'll have to hurry–that's the end of Topham's speech, by the cheering. Come along, through that door, and up on the little platform. Then you can see right through."

The children looked down the long corridor where the sunlight came in through the grid skylight, streaking the engines and fuel-tanks with bars of pale yellow, highly polished valves and levers glittered like diamonds in the shafts of sunlight. There was a warm smell of oil and metal, and the silence was as if they had suddenly become stone deaf. The Professor pressed a spring button beside him, and the transparent ventilators rolled open, letting in the sounds of cheering from the other end of the field, and a slight breeze made the ribbon on Jane's hair flutter. Martin clambered down into the well of the room to have a closer look at the shining, delicately constructed engine, the heart of the giant.

The Professor jumped down beside Martin. He pulled down levers and turned tiny knobs that started the engine running. Jane gave a little cry. The Professor looked round and grinned at her.

"Don't worry; we're not going off–the 'Luna I' can't start without her supper, and we're not fuelled yet," he reassured her.

"What fuel does she run on?" asked Martin, bending down and looking underneath the engine.

"Ah!" answered the Professor, "that, like the substance that the windows are made from and the metal of which she is constructed of, is a dead secret until after the flight. It's a mixture of liquid oxygen and something else; but the something else is what's going to make 'Luna' endure her long journey–the something else that's caused us all this trouble, and the snow to fall round my ears!" He pointed to the tiny patches of grey hair at his temples. "We've done, I think, all that men can do to reach the moon; the rest is in the lap of the gods."

He stood touching his engine, stroking the smooth metal gently, as if it were the back of a cat.

"Have you always wanted to see the moon?" Jane asked him. "Do you feel terribly excited about it now you're going there?"

The Professor smiled at her and shrugged his shoulders.

"I've always wanted to invent a rocket that would go to the moon, an engine that would be capable of carrying it and a fuel strong enough to feed the engine for sufficient length of time; but the moon, as the moon, is only a secondary consideration–I don't care if I'm the first man to arrive there or the hundredth, as long as my rocket is the first rocket to reach it. I'm looking forward to the flight with intense interest, and excitement, too, because I want to see for myself how 'Luna' behaves herself on the way; but if I see the red flash of the 'Luna I' I'll be content. In one way the real flight–the second one–will fall a little flat: it would be much more exciting to keep Scruff and Tessie company in the 'Luna I'." The aerodrome clock struck four o'clock "We'll have to leave all this," he went on. "Major Topham and his friends will be here soon. Anyway, you haven't seen the firing-ramp yet."

He shut off the engines, closed the ventilators and climbed up after Martin and Jane back into the cabin.

"May we go out of the 'tradesmen's entrance'?" asked Jane.

"We'll go no other way," returned the Professor, "unless we want to fall into the arms of the sightseers."

And they disappeared through the supply hatch to the soft turf of the field.

Major Topham and a party of friends were heading for the main door of the rocket. The Professor grabbed an arm of each of the children and held them tightly.

"Stay here a few minutes until they are all safely inside. Major Topham will want me to explain all kinds of things to people who will neither know nor care what I'm talking about," he whispered.

They crouched down under the huge wings of the rocket. Jane began to giggle, but a sharp pinch from Martin stopped her. She looked at him reproachfully; she was enjoying herself, and it was the first time for days.

"Welcome to my 'Luna'," they heard Major Topham's voice booming through the open windows of the rocket.

"You're going to explain *everything* to us, aren't you Major?" a woman's shrill voice asked.

"I'll explain things to you, Lady Hill," came the high-pitched tone of Cyril's voice.

The Professor winked at the children and put his finger on his lips; and they crept out from underneath the rocket.

The sun was making long shadows across the flying-field as they struggled through the chattering crowd to the red-and-white marquee where the welcome sound of tea-cups and the smell from the tea-urns brought Jane's thoughts back to earth. But Martin's mind was far away:

the Royal Air Force band was playing "Pomp and Circumstance", and a little man was standing on the speaker's rostrum dismantling the platform and loud speakers.

The Professor waved his hand to a burly figure in Air Force uniform coming out of the shed where the "Luna" was housed.

"Here comes a very special friend of mine," he told Martin and Jane. "Sergeant Hodson. We're going to rely on him a great deal in a day or two. Hodson!" he called.

The Sergeant looked round quickly and came towards them.

"Good afternoon, Professor," he said. "I've just been glancing over the 'First Lady in the Land'!"

His big white teeth grinned under his ginger moustache.

"And we've been glancing over her sister," laughed the Professor. "I want to introduce you to Jane and Martin Ridley–the girl and boy who are so interested in the 'Luna' that they have offered us their pets to send on the first flight."

The Sergeant shook hands with them.

"Major Topham mentioned you both in his speech," he told them. "I'm sure we're all very grateful to you; and we'll endeavour to bring your pets safely home when we return. It will mean their being a day or two without food, though," he said.

"Oh, dogs and cats, like human beings, are pretty tough," the Professor said airily. "Besides, they are a dog and cat belonging to a family of famous explorers, so I've no doubt that they will settle down in no time to 'living rough.' "

The sun went down, and the evening became clear and chilly as the last of the crowd straggled across the aero-

drome grounds, the older people talking and shaking their heads over the hazardous flight which was to take place within the next few hours, and the children excitedly throwing pieces of broken sticks and branches into the air to see who could send one farthest from the ground.

Martin and Jane took the road leading through the woods. They had many things to talk about before they reached Mill House.

They walked along without speaking until they were clear of people. Now that they had seen the "Luna I" and listened to the Professor, they had a strange feeling of unreality, as if it were a dream, and that presently the alarm clock would wake them at seven-thirty and they would simply walk to school as usual. Martin was the first one to break the silence.

"Well, it seems all plain sailing now," he said.

"Did you manage to see the firing-ramp all right?" Jane asked him.

"Yes. You see, after tea, when the Professor asked me to go over to the shed and fetch Sergeant Hodson, I went round by the firing-ramp. Cyril is quite right: the side by the hedge is so high that no one can see over it, and there's a little tunnel running through the wall. It looks like a fairly big drain, but we could easily crawl through. We won't be able to take an awful lot of things: our school bags and Father's rucksack is as much as we'll get through: we can't make two journeys."

He walked along staring at the ground.

"When we take Scruff and Tessie down to-morrow night," Jane said, "we'll take the two blankets, and make Major Topham or whoever we see promise to put them in for Scruff and Tessie to sleep on. I asked the Professor while you were away where they were going to be during

the flight, and he said in the locker with the holes bored in, so that's easy; the blankets will be something soft for them to sleep on."

Jane was a sensible and practical girl.

Martin nodded.

"That's a good idea. There will be no difficulty about getting in the 'Luna I', because that supply hatch won't be locked till the last moment. There are six lockers; we must be careful not to get in the ones with the holes bored. As soon as the rocket is fired we must dash out and strap ourselves in the hammocks; otherwise we'll spend the flight on the ceiling. Oh, I've thought out how we can let Father and Mother know. You know Charlie Minns?" he asked.

"Charlie Minns?" said Jane. "No, I've never heard of him."

"Yes, you have," he answered. "Old Minns' boy–Old Minns the butcher. Well, I'll tell Charlie to take a note to Mother at nine-fifteen–that's a quarter of an hour after we go. And I'll tell him that if he promises to take the note exactly at that time and not to tell a soul about it I'll give him my cricket bat. He wants one, and Old Minns won't buy one for him because he says he'll break the windows; so he'll do anything to get one."

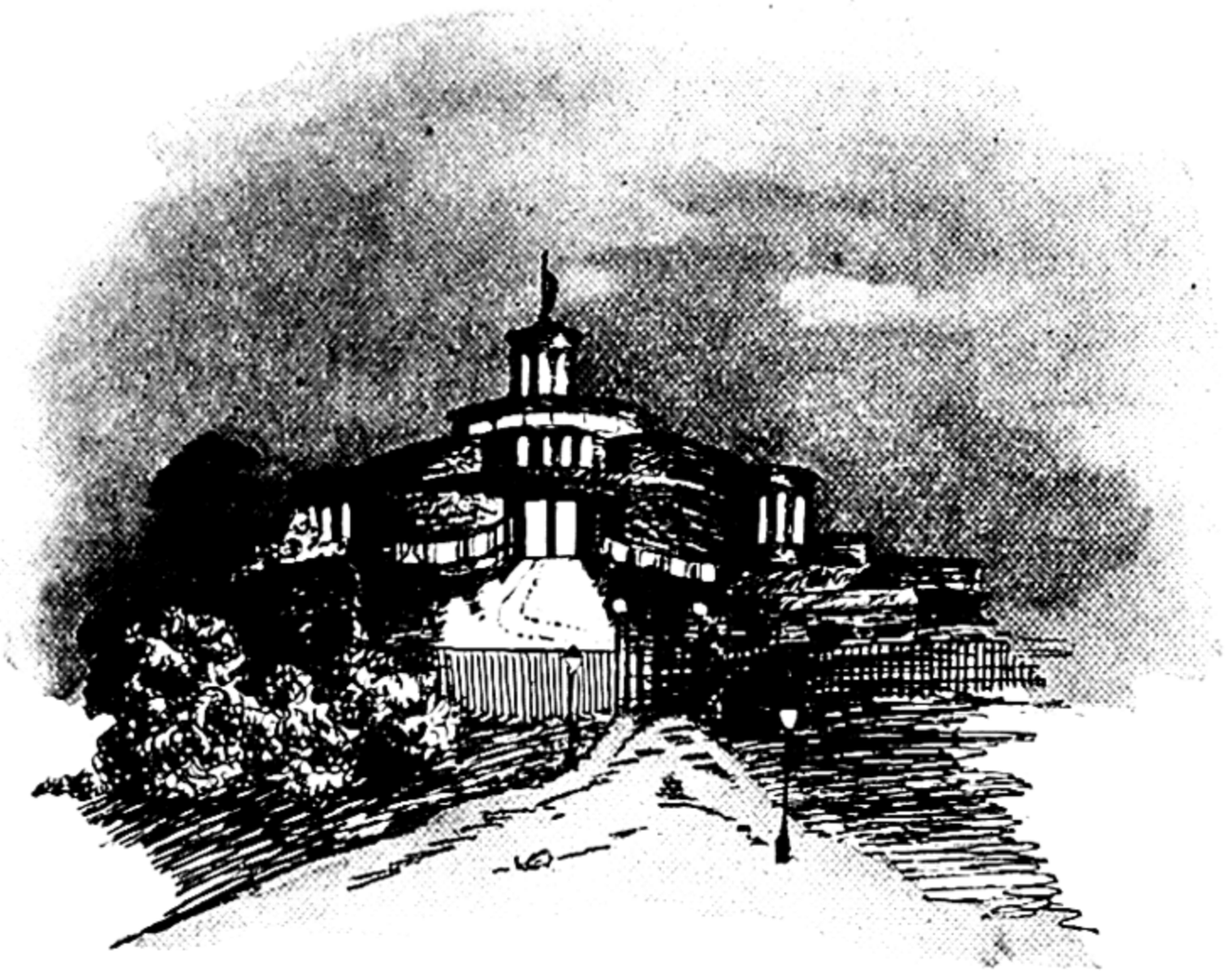
He looked at Jane, who was wrinkling up her forehead: she hated doing bad things to people whom she loved.

"I know what you're thinking, Jane," he went on kindly. "I hate that part of it, too. Father will understand, but Mother won't; but you know, Jane, she's had a lot of this kind of worry before. Father said once to Dr. Scubby that he didn't know any woman who would have stood all the worry he'd caused her while he was on his travels except Mother. I heard him, not long ago either.

So you see it won't be a new kind of worry: it'll be just like Father."

Jane nodded slowly. It was too late to draw back now: she couldn't let Martin go alone. Anyway, she wanted to go.

They saw the amber lights in Mill House twinkling through the trees, and smelt the faint smell from their father's bonfire. Scruff's bark came shrilly through the still autumn evening; a blackbird perched on the top branch of the elm-tree sang her last song before she found her nest for the night; a cow lowed in the distance; another one answered her; and the clop-clop of a farm horse being led up the road to his stables were the last sounds Martin and Jane heard as they turned into their garden gate. They were both wondering how long it would be before they heard these sounds again, that they knew and loved so well.



Chapter VIII

THE tension in the Ridley family had lessened during the last twenty-four hours, and life had become normal again: Mrs. Ridley had reconciled herself to the animals being offered for the "Luna" flight, and Mr. Ridley, after his one outburst, had refused to discuss it. As for Martin and Jane, they had spent one of the most tedious days they had ever known in their lives: it seemed such a waste of time sitting in school listening to their masters droning out the lessons. The morning seemed endless, but by the afternoon they had begun to count the hours until nine o'clock with suppressed excitement. Of course everyone in both their schools had heard by this time that they had volunteered to send their dog and cat to the moon in the "Luna I", and the questions were rather embarrassing; but they both swore they had been bound to secrecy, and firmly refused to answer anything. Jane was far more

worried about giving away their plot than Martin; he was accustomed to keeping his thoughts to himself. But the hours went by, and at last they met at the cross-roads on their way home to tea. They grinned at each other like the two conspirators they were, and walked up the hill for a few minutes without exchanging a word. Martin was the first to speak.

"As soon as it's dusk take the school bags over to the mill. I'll show you where I've hidden the sack as we go home. I've put it there under the nettles. By the time you've packed them I'll join you with my telescope and camera. We'll have to hurry, though, as we've got to get down to the aerodrome and hide our things in the ditch and then come back to fetch Tessie and Scruff before eight o'clock, and it doesn't get dusk until about six-thirty or seven."

He pitched his voice almost to a whisper, for although there was only a cow to overhear him, at this stage he wasn't taking any risks.

"Have you written the note to Mother?" asked Jane.

Martin took a crumpled envelope from his pocket.

"Here it is," he answered. "I'll have to find Charlie Minns, too; I'll go round after tea and look for him. He usually goes up to the pond in the evenings to fish."

This was the last time they would be together to make any plans before starting on their flight, and within a few minutes they would be home.

Jane stopped dead.

"Now, have we thought of everything?" she asked him.

Martin stood and scratched his head, going over the details of the preparation for the flight in his mind. He nodded slowly, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Yes," he answered. "Everything. Like the Professor, we'll now cross our fingers and say 'We hope'."

They both walked along with their fingers crossed until they came in sight of their home. Their Mother was tying up the pink and purple asters to little sticks, and looked up as they turned into the garden gate. She smiled at them, dusting the dry mud off her fingers.

"I'd no idea it was so late," she said cheerfully. "Jane, darling, tell Ethel to make tea, will you? And I'll go up and wash my hands. These poor asters were all broken down: your Father thinks there's a fox around after the chickens. You'll have to wait here under the bushes with your air-gun, Martin, one night and catch him."

She hurried indoors as the children turned in the direction of the kitchen.

As the dusk fell Jane's long, slim legs ran swiftly and silently down the road leading to the mill. She kept close to the hedge, hugging the two school bags, and then disappeared into a tangle of tall weeds and nettles that grew out of the fallen stone and brickwork of the ruined water-mill. Martin had forgotten to show her where he had hidden the sack of stores, but with the aid of a fallen branch she poked about, and eventually found it. Going down on her knees, she held her breath and listened. There was no sound except the steady drip, drip where the mill-pond overflowed into the ditch beside her. She untied the sack quickly and packed the stores she had collected into the school bags and rucksack, adding a bottle of milk and two meaty bones to her store cupboard: even if Scruff and Tessie are on the moon, she thought, there's no need for them to do without their milk and bones!

"Pst!"

Jane started to her feet, and saw Martin's tow-coloured head poking over the nettles.

"You startled me out of my life," she scolded him.

He laughed at her quietly and screwed up his face as he came towards her.

"All packed?" he asked, and looked down at the tightly packed bags. "That's fine. I tested the water-tanks and food-tubes in the 'Luna I', and they are all full, so we'll be all right until we get to the moon." He looked up at the clear, darkening sky. The stars were not yet showing. "I wonder how far we'll be up there this time to-morrow?" he said seriously.

Jane looked up and held her breath. The evening was chilly, and the sky looked even farther away than usual, she thought. She put her arm round Martin's shoulder, and they stood gazing upwards into the darkening blue heavens like two explorers studying the map of their journey into the unknown. A distant clock struck a quarter past seven. It was a signal that they would have to be moving, for there were still things to do. Martin had found Charlie Minns fishing as usual in the pond by the village green, and he had promised Charlie his cricket bat if he would take the note to Mrs. Ridley at nine-fifteen that night; but he hinted that if Charlie told anyone about the note beforehand, instead of a cricket bat there would very likely be a punch on the head. Charlie's eyes glittered with joy over the thought of the bat. He had no intention of breaking his promise when such a prize awaited him.

Jane followed Martin through the fields to the aerodrome, keeping near the hedge all the way. They went slowly, as the bags were very heavy, and they had to rest once or twice before they reached the ditch beside the flying-field. They saw the corner of the huge concrete firing-ramp looming blackly in front of them over the hedge, and Martin bent down and pointed to the tunnel running down into the ditch at their feet. They

hid their store-bags as close to the mouth of the tunnel as possible and pulled the rough undergrowth over them. Even in daylight it would have been difficult for anyone to find them.

They worked quickly and silently, and then crept back through the ditch and to the road. It was now nearly eight o'clock, and they had to get home, collect Scruff and Tessie and be back at the aerodrome. They started to run, and only stopped when they were within sight of their house.

Jane ran quickly upstairs to the playroom in search of Tessie. She had been careful to shut her in there before she went out, as she knew her cat's love of roaming beyond the garden hunting for field mice. She had been worried all the time they were hiding their stores in case Tessie cried and someone let her out; but she didn't tell Martin so. It was a great relief to her to open the door and find the cat calmly washing her tail. Tessie looked up and mewed as soon as she came in. Jane picked her up and kissed her soft black fur.

"Tessie, darling," she crooned, "we're going a long, long way, where there won't be any mice."

The cat cuddled up to her, purring and half-shutting her eyes.

"Dear Tessie," murmured Jane as she took one last look round the playroom. A book that Martin had been reading was open and face downwards on the seat of the armchair, one of her father's pipe-cleaners was on the mantelpiece, a reel of pink silk with a needle stuck in it from her mother's work-basket had rolled under the table where her own bulb-bowl stood–she had planted daffodils to bloom on Christmas Day.

She stood a minute or two, her eyes misty and a queer little pain in her throat.

"Dear Tessie," she whispered again, and hurried downstairs into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Ridley was sitting by the fire gently tapping the arms of her chair with her fingers. Her husband was reading a book about Cape Horn, and marking passages with pencil. He looked up as Jane opened the door.

"Where's Martin?" she asked.

"He went down to the kitchen," answered her mother in a faint voice. "To find Scruff," she added, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Let me kiss the dear cat," she said tearfully.

Jane walked over to her, stroking Tessie.

"They'll soon be back, Mother," she assured her. "Really they will. Professor Erdleigh said as soon as he arrives on the moon, the first thing he'll do is to let them out of the rocket."

She put her arms round her mother and kissed her.

Martin came in with Scruff pattering at his heels. He tucked his mouth in at the corners as he caught his father's eyes across the room. He felt suddenly terribly sick, and longed to say something; but it seemed as if he'd forgotten every word in the English language–in an hour's time he would be hundreds of miles from the earth, soaring upwards to. . . . He had only a vague idea where. The curious numbness that he had felt on Sunday evening had returned. He shifted his eyes to his mother. She was still kissing Tessie, who was beginning to struggle and twitch her tail.

"Well, you two had better be off," Mr. Ridley remarked calmly, "if you still mean to proceed with this hare-brained idea." He whistled, and Scruff bounded towards him, wagging his little, stumpy tail. Mr. Ridley patted the dog's back. "No walks to-night, old boy," he said, and returned to his book.

"Good-bye," Jane said, and stood a moment in the doorway.

"Good-bye," Martin echoed.

Their father and mother answered them without bothering even to glance in their direction. After all, they were only going as far as the aerodrome: they would be home again in about twenty minutes. . . .

"Wasn't it awful?" said Jane shakily as she hurried along beside Martin, with Tessie under one arm and the car rug under the other.

Martin grunted. He was thankful it was over. As soon as he left the room and was out on the road the sick feeling went and his mind began working normally again.

"I brought Scruff's chain. I thought we might want it," was all he said.

The aerodrome lights came in view. There seemed to be a lot of activity going on round the flying-field: a searchlight was switched on for an instant, sweeping the sky like a chalk mark on a blackboard and then went out again.

"Now," said Martin, "when you hand over Tessie, cry! And cry as hard as you can: don't look excited or pleased or angry–just cry. Make them promise to put the blankets in with Scruff and Tessie. We'll get it over as soon as we can; and if they want us to stay and see them put in the rocket, say 'No'. Leave the rest to me. After we leave the aerodrome follow me and do everything I do. We won't be able to speak, in case we're heard. As soon as you get in the passenger cabin dash into the first locker you see that hasn't any holes in, and wrap your coat round your head, because we won't be strapped in a hammock, remember, and there's sure to be concussion from the firing. As soon as we hear them leave after putting Scruff and Tessie in, open your locker lid; if you should hear

anyone coming back, we'll shut it again. I'll tell you what to do as soon as we're fired." He glanced at her. "Feel all right?" he asked.

Jane nodded.

"Yes, I feel fine now," she answered. "I felt a bit awful when I was with Mother and Father, but I feel all right now."

"We're here," Martin said grimly. "Don't forget to cry; have you got a handkerchief?"

Jane giggled nervously and nodded.

"Stop giggling," Martin told her savagely under his breath, and led the way to the sentry on duty at the aerodrome gates.

"Halt," called the sentry as he caught sight of the silhouettes of the two children.

"May we pass?" asked Martin. "We want to see Professor Erdleigh."

"You can't see Professor Erdleigh or anyone else tonight, my boy," the sentry told him. "Now, run off, there's a good boy," he added in a patronising voice.

"Oh, I can't see Professor Erdleigh?" returned Martin truculently. "You see this dog? Well . . ."

At that moment a tall, broad figure appeared behind the sentry box.

"Is that Martin and Jane Ridley?" asked a friendly north-country voice.

"Yes," answered Martin. "Is that Sergeant Hodson?"

"It is." The Sergeant came out to the gate. "Come along. The Professor was getting a little anxious about you, and sent me down here to find you. We're all ready. So these are the two passengers?" He looked down at the cat and dog. "Well, they'll have a better time of it than we will," he laughed. "They won't know where they're going!"

"Don't you want to go to the moon, then?" asked Jane, hurrying along beside him across the field.

The Sergeant gave another little laugh.

"Well," he said, "between you and me, I'd rather be going to Blackpool. The top of the Big Wheel is as high as I want to go really, you know. I've got two kids the same age as you," he added, without any apparent reason.

The sturdy outline of the Professor came towards them.

"Oh, there you are," he said, "I was wondering if you'd cry off at the last moment."

Scruff jumped delightedly round as the Professor bent down and patted him.

"You'll be the first dog on the moon, Scruff," he laughed.

Jane was trying her hardest to look miserable; she felt it would be quite easy to cry at any moment with excitement. Martin put his arm round her shoulders and patted her.

"Jane's feeling very miserable now she sees her cat going off," he told the Professor, giving Jane a sharp kick under cover of the darkness. "It's no use crying any more, Jane," he said sympathetically. "Tessie will be as right as rain."

Jane took her handkerchief out of her sleeve and blew her nose. The Professor put his arm round her.

"Oh, my poor Jane! Listen, my dear. It's not too late. If you don't want your cat to go, you've only to tell me." He put his hands on her shoulders. "Now, do you want your cat to go, dear?" he asked her.

Another sharp kick on her ankle made her nod her head as she moved away out of reach of Martin's thick, heavy shoes.

"Yes, Professor, I do–really I do. I'm sorry, but I do really want her to go; you'll go there and let her out."

She gave her nose another blow and tucked the handkerchief up her sleeve.

"Of course I will," the Professor answered. "And I'll bring them home safely to you." He looked round at the little knot of men who were standing by the firing-ramp. "I think we ought to be moving, you know; it's getting on for eight-thirty, and we're due off at nine o'clock."

Martin put his hand on the Professor's arm.

"Do you mind if we don't wait," he asked.

"No, no," answered the Professor, "of course not. Perhaps it would be better if the animals were put straight in now, and they will get used to their new quarters."

He took Tessie in his arms and bent down to pick up Scruff.

"We've brought these two blankets," Martin told him. "We thought that they'd like to have blankets that smelt of us to sleep on."

"Yes, a good idea." The Professor was anxious to get away. "Sergeant, catch hold of these blankets, will you, and bring them along?" The Professor turned to the children. "I'll let you know how the 'Luna I' started, tomorrow. Good night. And thanks for Scruff and Tessie."

Martin and Jane hurried away and through the gates on to the road. Martin sauntered up the road for a few yards, followed by Jane, and then looked back over his shoulder. He was far enough round the bend of the road to be out of sight of the sentry. He twitched Jane's skirt and pointed to the hedge. They crawled through a gap and lowered themselves down into the ditch the other side, and stood still and listened. They heard only voices in the distance, coming from the aerodrome, but no footsteps. Bending themselves nearly double, they crept quietly along the ditch. It was damp, and the leaves and

twigs were rotten and soft, and smelt like mushrooms. They soon saw the black shoulder of the firing-ramp in front of them over the hedge, and Martin sank down on his knees and pulled the bags from under the tangled weeds beside him. He slung one over his shoulder and his telescope-case over the other, and handed the other school satchel to Jane; the rucksack went over his back. He signalled to Jane to go down on her hands and knees. As she bent down she saw his heels disappearing through the tunnel, and tightened the strap of her school bag and began to crawl after him, not daring to breathe. The metal buckles of the rucksack glittered as they caught a shaft of light from the arc lamp hanging over the firing-ramp: it guided her to Martin.

The rocket lay like a huge bird in its nest of concrete and steel, and the sky, studded with stars, seemed its natural course. The night was full of the smells of autumn and the distant voices of men.

Martin climbed up the steps of the firing-ramp and underneath the great wings of the 'Luna I', hoping Jane could see him well enough to be able to follow. He felt for the lever of the supply hatch and gently pulled it down, and the door swung open. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Jane's head appearing over the edge of the concrete platform. He breathed thankfully, for it had all depended on whether she could see him; there had not been time to show her the way beforehand. He put his foot on the little steel step of the door and climbed into the cabin, reaching down to help Jane up; but she was in the cabin almost as soon as he was.

"Quick!" he whispered, shutting the hatch after her; "in that locker. There's only a few minutes." He scrambled in beside her. "It's a tight squash, but we'll be out in no time."

They waited, scarcely breathing, and presently they heard the main door of the rocket open and recognised the Professor's voice.

"Put them in that large locker, Sergeant," he was saying, "and the blankets, too. You'll find a rug there as well. Put that in; there's no weight in it, and it will be more comfortable for them." They heard the Sergeant cross the floor and stand beside the locker in which they were hiding. Once his foot kicked against it and he touched the lid. They were sure he'd open it, and that would be the end. He moved away, and they felt limp with relief, but not for long: heavy footsteps came nearer and nearer the locker, then stopped.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?" the Professor's voice enquired.

Martin bit his nails.

"The supply hatch, sir," answered the Sergeant.

Martin bit down on his knuckle. His forehead and top lip were wet, and he felt a trickle running down inside his shirt.

"Supply hatch?" said the Professor quickly. "What's wrong with it?"

"Well, I'm sure I put the safety-catch up about an hour ago, and now it's unlocked."

They heard a little click as the Sergeant locked it.

"I'm the culprit, Sergeant," the Professor answered. "I came in here just after you'd left, to bring in that rug and see that the holes were properly bored in the locker chest, and I went out by way of the hatch. That's one reason I came here now–to relock it." He laughed. "Afraid of burglars?"

"Well," grumbled the Sergeant, "you can't be too careful. I saw that little varmint Cyril hanging about. If he was my boy—"

"You'd never have such an unpleasant boy, Hodson, so don't worry," broke in the Professor. "Now, it's just on nine o'clock. Out we go and cross our fingers."

The children gave a sigh when they heard the main door bang. Martin opened the locker lid a crack and peeped out.

The cabin, which had been dark when they entered it, was now dimly lighted by little iridescent buttons over each locker. Martin propped the lock open with his shoulder.

"Take your coat off, Jane," he said, struggling with his own, "and wrap it over your head, and as soon as I say go make a dash for the hammocks."

Not a sound was heard from the field outside. There was a ticking noise at the opposite end of the cabin, and a tiny red light showed over the barometer. "I think we'll be off any second, Jane," Martin said calmly.

He drew in his head. They crouched down on the floor, watching the dim light through the partly opened lid. There was no sound except the tick tick tick tick tick. . . .

Chapter IX

THE cheering went on for several minutes after the "Luna I" had left the earth on the longest and strangest voyage that any craft had ever made. And the five men who were to follow her in the "Luna" watched the tiny red light in her tail until it was out of sight: the success of the "Luna I's" voyage meant a great deal to each of them.

Dr. Hobbes, the botanist, wondered if, after all, there would prove to be vegetation on that icy-cold planet. After years of research, he now felt there was possibility a of some kind of plant: he had found so many things that by all laws of Nature seemed impossible.

Brian Cooke had the firm conviction that there were minerals on the moon. He had discovered minerals where no man dreamed they could exist, and he smiled as he gazed up at the starry sky, thinking how odd it would be to be setting up a mine-shaft on another planet.

Professor Erdleigh had only one thought: that his

rocket would complete her voyage; he crossed his fingers and "he hoped".

Sergeant Hodson felt the sooner it arrived on the moon the sooner he would be home again in Blackpool.

Major Topham thought of the huge amount of money the expedition had cost him; but it would be worth it to be the first man on the moon. He swung round on his heel, well pleased with himself and the rest of the world, and slapped the Professor soundly on the back.

"And now we'll drink to the success of the 'Luna'. Come along, everyone," he said heartily, leading the way across the flying-field to the Officers' Mess at the aerodrome, where a row of glasses and champagne bottles awaited them.

"Champagne is the only drink worthy of the 'Luna'," he said boisterously, twisting the strong, thin wires that held the cork in. The cork came out with a terrific report and hit the ceiling. "A most hopeful omen," he added, as the wine foamed and spilled on the glass-topped table.

The Professor dipped his fingers in the little golden puddle of wine and seriously dabbed behind his ears and on top of his head. This caused a roar of laughter from everyone, as the Professor's superstitions were famous.

"Do you think I'd risk bad luck to-night?" he laughed back at them. "But if things go wrong with this flight I'll never be superstitious again as long as I live."

"Poor old Erdleigh!" chaffed Hobbes. "He's been running away from ladders, and counting lucky horses for weeks."

"Yes," chimed in Cooke, "and he kept his windows open all night the first night of the new moon in case he saw it through glass!"

"You wait until I get you both on the moon," the Professor told them.

Everyone was in high spirits.

"Come," Major Topham said, and held up his glass. "The 'Luna'."

The commotion outside in the corridor was hardly heard above the laughter and voices of the men in the Mess; but they all stopped talking as Sergeant Hodson, capless and tunic unbuttoned, rushed into the room, his face white and glistening in the bright lamplight.

"Major! Professor!" he panted, "the 'Luna I'."

The Professor stiffened; the stem of his glass snapped.

"She's crashed?" he asked calmly.

The Sergeant shook his head breathlessly.

"Crashed? No," he panted; "but there's two kids in her!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Sergeant," snapped Major Topham. "Have a drink."

The Sergeant took the glass mechanically.

"It's true. The two Ridley kids have gone with their cat and dog."

He gulped down the champagne without tasting it.

Major Topham stared at the Sergeant speechlessly for a few seconds and then let out a roar.

"Why did no one search the cabin before the 'take off'? Why were the guards not there? How did the little urchins get in?"

He paused for breath.

"But are you sure of this, Sergeant," asked Doctor Hobbes. "How do you know they went?"

"Oh yes, sir, I'm sure all right. You see, after we'd launched her I went down to the 'Swan' to drink her health, and while I was there in comes Minns, the butcher down in the village. It seems that this afternoon young Martin Ridley promised to give Minns's boy Charlie his cricket bat if Charlie would take a note to

Mrs. Ridley at a quarter-past nine to-night. When he gets there Mr. and Mrs. Ridley are in the hall talking to Dr. Scubby; Charlie hands in the note and waits, meaning to ask for the bat. Mrs. Ridley reads the note, screams and faints. Her husband picks up the note and reads it out. They're all too busy talking and trying to bring Mrs. Ridley round to bother about Charlie, so he waits. Dr. Scubby notices him listening, cuffs him on the ear, and off the boy goes, meets his father on the way, just by the 'Swan', and tells him what's happened. I was in such a state I just ran straight on here." He wiped his face with a huge handkerchief. "When I think of those two poor kids."

He shook his head.

"And when I think of them, too," roared Major Topham.

He clenched his fists and glared round at his friends, cursing the children and everyone else for their carelessness. During this outburst the Professor stole quietly away.

"There's one thing I must do," he thought as he crossed the field where the "Luna I" had been launched only half an hour ago, "and that is I must see those children's parents before I go out to Greenwich: I feel responsible for what's happened, and I must see them. Why, oh why, didn't I realise the kind of boy he was? And the family he'd come from? He has courage and intelligence–those things will help him; but the conditions on the moon–who knows?–with no equipment . . ."

The Professor's head swam. The few minutes' walk to Mill House seemed an hour. He dreaded the reception he would meet with there, but he knew it was his duty to tell of the part he had played in the children's journey. His heart was heavy as he lifted the door knocker at Mill

House. The door was opened at once by a red-eyed and terrified maid.

"May I see Mr. Ridley?" enquired the Professor.

The maid hesitated.

"What name, sir, please?" she asked.

"Professor Erdleigh. I won't keep him more than a few minutes."

He ran his fingers round his collar.

The tall figure of Mr. Ridley was silhouetted against the lighted room behind him as he walked quickly towards the Professor.

"I heard your name through the open door, Professor," he said quietly. "Please come in."

He led the way into the brightly lighted drawing-room.

The two men stood looking at each other, each weighing the other in his mind before forming an opinion. Mr. Ridley was the first to speak.

"It is good of you to come, Professor," he said simply, and held out his hand.

The Professor grasped it and held it for a moment.

"It will do little good," he answered, shrugging his shoulders, "or be of little comfort to you and your wife; but, you see, in a way I am responsible for all this. I answered Martin's questions about the moon and the rocket. I showed both the children over the 'Luna I' on Monday, and I explained to Martin how it worked. My faith in the rocket is great; it will, I feel sure, reach its target. After that"–he spread out his hands–"no one knows."

Mr. Ridley ran his fingers slowly through his hair, keeping his eyes fixed on the Professor. He shook his head gently.

"There is no blame attached to you in any way. This is a thing that one day was bound to happen. You see, in

my days of exploration we sailed in ships, and travelled on our feet, exploring the earth. The earth has been explored: now the only method left is by rocket to further planets. No, Professor, you are not to blame, and neither is he. I know him. He listened to my stories of travel. I saw the restlessness growing in him. The anxiety that I'm feeling now is simply the anxiety I caused all my life to my parents, and later to my wife. But I wish he'd gone alone." He looked up with a one-sided smile. "He'll have to learn, amongst other things, not to take women with him."

"I thought as I walked up your garden path this evening, that I would meet an enemy. I think I was mistaken," the Professor said in a rather unsteady voice.

Mr. Ridley rose from his seat and came to the Professor's side.

"No, by no means an enemy; I hope most sincerely, when all this is over, a friend. The launching of the second rocket will I suppose be in a day or two?"

The Professor nodded.

"Yes. The spearhead of the first rocket is loaded with pellets which will fire off a brilliant red flash on landing. As soon as we see that we'll know the 'Luna I' has arrived safely on the moon. Then we will launch our second rocket in the shortest possible time. Depend upon that, Mr. Ridley; there is now a second object in the flight." He glanced at his watch. "We are going straight away to Greenwich to wait for that flash and follow the progress of the rocket as well as science will let us."

The two men walked silently to the front door and shook hands.

"Good night," said Mr. Ridley; "and thank you for coming to see me."

"Good night," answered the Professor. "The next time

I come I hope I'll have those two adventurers with me. Rest assured I'll do my best."

Mr. Ridley stood watching the road until the Professor was lost in the shadow of the trees. He glanced up at the sky with its millions of stars, some shining steadily like the lights of a harbour, some twinkling as broken glass does when it catches the sun's rays. It was like an immense city seen at night from a long way off. A bat flew across the moon, and Mr. Ridley shivered slightly and turned towards the front door.

The Professor blinked in the bright lights of the Mess Room. Major Topham was standing with his hands in his pockets, glaring at the little ring of men round him, who seemed relieved at the sight of the calm, thick-set figure of the Professor.

"Well," said the Professor, "it's almost time we were moving. I passed the car as I came in the aerodrome gates."

Major Topham made a gesture of impatience, jingling the keys in his pocket.

"I know how you feel, Topham," the Professor said, laying a hand on his shoulder, "I do indeed."

Major Topham shook the sympathetic hand away.

"The second flight's off. The object of the expedition no longer exists: I've spent a fortune on equipping this flight," Major Topham burst out angrily.

The Professor looked at the angry man steadily.

"The original object no longer exists," he corrected slowly. "We will not be the first people on the moon. But another object has taken its place–that of a rescue party." He turned to the little ring of men. "My friends, if there are no volunteers, I propose to lead a rescue party–of one–at the first possible moment after we have seen the red flash on the moon's face."

The Sergeant buttoned up his tunic as if he were ready to start straight away.

"I'm still the 'strong man of the party', Professor," he said quietly. "My original object still exists."

Dr. Hobbes said, "Of course I'll join your party."

"I agree with Hobbes. Yes, you can count on me as well," Brian Cooke told him.

No one looked at Major Topham: he cleared his throat.

"And I, gentlemen, will lead the rescue party." His voice sounded quieter than anyone had ever heard it; he held out his hand to the Professor. "You're right, Professor, we have another object."

The little party of men walked across the dark flying-field to the waiting car which was to carry them through the night to Greenwich Observatory.

THE VOYAGE OF THE
LUNA I

Part Two

Chapter I

MARTIN lay on the floor of the cabin for a few seconds before scrambling to his feet. There was complete silence. He could see the dim outline of Jane lying face downwards a foot or two away from him. His heart missed a beat as he bent over her, touching her gently. It was a difficult task to keep his balance owing to the tilt of the cabin.

"Jane," he called in an unnaturally loud voice.

She rolled over on her side, looking dazed and a little scared. Martin's tremendous hug of relief brought her to her senses.

"I just stayed there," she laughed shakily. "What's happened?"

"Get in that hammock," he told her, pointing to the one next to the pilot's seat, "and strap yourself in quickly." He reached the pilot's hammock in one bound and strapped his feet to the ground. "There may be no need to do this, but I'm not sure yet."

"But what's happened?" asked Jane again, buckling the canvas belt round her waist. "We can't have started; there wasn't a sound."

"Of course there wasn't," answered Martin, with his eyes on the speedometer ticking away behind its thick mica case. "We're travelling faster than sound. But we're travelling all right. Look at that!"

He pointed to the speedometer.

Jane bent forward, her eyes bright with excitement; she gave a long "Oh" and stared at the tiny ticking hand that marked the speed.

"Now," said Martin briskly. "I'm going to unstrap one of my feet and see what happens."

He stood up and tested his foothold; then, holding on to the side of the hammock, unbuckled the other foot. He was standing firmly, but had to throw his weight backwards to avoid pitching forward. He let go of the canvas gently. Nothing happened. He still stood his ground.

"I'll stow away these stores," he went on; "they were thrown out with us from the locker." He rapidly collected the school bags and rucksack and put them in a locker chest while he talked. "There's no need to strap yourself in yet, but keep near the hammock."

"We must let Scruff and Tessie out," Jane said, sliding gingerly out of her hammock.

"No, we can't do that. We'd never be able to hold

them down when the weightlessness start. They'll have to stay in their locker. Sorry, Jane, but they must."

His voice was so firm that Jane meekly nodded her head!

"Now, let's see what it looks like outside," he said, hoisting himself onto a locker chest and touching the button of the spring window-shutter.

It was like looking out at a black velvet curtain. They had been travelling for only a few minutes, but the rocket was already clear of the earth's atmosphere, and now that the shadowy veil of our earth's air had been drawn away, the stars shone with a hard, steel brilliance: they no longer twinkled with friendliness, their rays had become points of almost blinding light; cold and blue, shining steadily in the airless sky. Martin was to gaze on the heavens and sweep them with giant telescopes many thousands of times during the course of his later life, but the memory of his first sight of the inky, star-dusted sky never left him. He was to see many things rare and strange during the years ahead, but his heart never beat as quickly as now, kneeling by his sister's side looking out of the "Luna I" on the wonder of the night sky.

"The odd thing is that the stars don't twinkle, and they are all the same colour," said Jane at length. "I wonder why that is?"

"Well," Martin explained, pressing his face to the window, "you see, we've got clear of the vapour that surrounds the earth. The stars don't really twinkle: it's the haze we see them through that makes them seem to; the haze breaks up the light. I can't explain all that now. There are lots of books at home in the playroom about it. When we get back you can read them. But isn't it the most marvellous thing you've ever seen?" he asked her.

She put her head on one side and considered the sky.

"I like the way they look from the earth better," she said slowly. "I wonder what the earth looks like from here? But I suppose we couldn't see it."

Martin climbed down from the hammock and, kneeling on the floor of the cabin, lifted up a round metal plate and uncovered a window. He peered through it for a few seconds, then called to Jane. She knelt down and looked through.

"It's all cloudy," she said. "I can't see anything."

"Look closely," Martin told her.

"Oh yes, now I can," she answered. "But it's the moon! How can we look down on the moon?"

"We're not looking down on the moon," he said; "that's the earth, silly."

She looked at him incredulously, her eyes round and her mouth half open.

"That? The earth?" she said at last, and looked down through the window again. "That patch of silver the earth?"

She gazed down at her native planet in wonder.

The light from the earth shone bluish through the strata atmosphere, less intense than that of the moon, but some parts were very brilliant, lighting up high mountain ranges and casting shadows more clear than is possible from the lunar mountains. It was surrounded by rings of cloudy vapour. Its expanse seemed enormous compared with the moon.

"When we get on the moon we'll be sitting in the earth-light instead of the moonlight," Martin told her. " Don't you know what 'new moon in the old moon's arms' means?"

Jane shook her head.

"No, I don't think I do, except that there's a kind of

reflection from the new moon that makes it faintly like a disk," she answered.

"The reflection is from the earth, on the dark part of the moon," he told her.

"I wish we'd seen the earth when it was full," she said regretfully.

"Well, we couldn't have done that," returned Martin, shutting down the lid of the window, "because if the earth had been full, the moon would have been too new to have been seen from the earth, and there would have been no target for anyone to aim at."

Jane looked at him with admiration.

"I didn't know you knew so much, Martin," she said to him. "When did you learn it?"

"Bit at school, bit at home–and climbing out of my window," he added, with a short laugh. "Now, we'd better get back to our hammocks, or we'll find ourselves floating up to the ceiling."

"Will we have to stay strapped in all the journey?" asked Jane.

"I don't know. According to everyone except the Professor we will; but he said he was going to experiment and see–that's what I'm going to do," Martin answered, again taking up his stand at the window.

This was the first time either of them had mentioned or thought of anyone left behind on the earth; they both remained silent for a few moments, until Martin burst out laughing.

"I wonder what old Topham's doing?" he said cheerfully. "Having a row with Father, I expect."

Jane joined in his laughter; the picture of Major Topham's fury was very vivid.

"When will we arrive on the moon?" she asked Martin. "I mean how long will we take to get there?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I didn't like to ask too many questions, in case the Professor should guess what we were going to do, and there were so many other things to find out that were important."

He turned away from the window and began examining the oxygen pumps. They were all in perfect order. He began to test all the apparatus in the cabin. Nothing had suffered in any way from the shock of launching. In fact, apart from a bump on each of their heads caused by being flung out of the locker, everything was intact. But they were prepared for bumps on the head; they seem to be small things when you are voyaging to another planet.

The tilt of the cabin was less pronounced: they seemed to be flying at a more horizontal angle, which made movement easier.

"Prepare yourself for a shock, Jane," Martin said over his shoulder as he crossed to the other side of the cabin. He touched one of the spring shutters. "Look!"

The huge shoulder of the moon came round the corner of the window, flooding the cabin with a brilliant cold light; but, unlike the silvery moonlight we are accustomed to see, it was a hard, unearthly light that made Jane screw her eyes up when she looked at it. She ran quickly across the floor to Martin, and gazed out on the blinding planet which was to be the terminus of their journey. The stars had been an astonishing sight, but their first glimpse of the moon left them speechless. The vivid light turned Martin's hair pure white and the yellow of Jane's dress a curious green. Everything in the cabin looked different–nothing had any connection with things as they had been before Martin let the blind shutter up. For the first time they realised that they had started on their journey into the unknown.

Jane put her hand timidly on Martin's shoulder; the rough wool of his jersey had a friendly feeling, and the bone of his shoulder was firm and solid, unlike anything else round her. She thought of the earth she had seen a few minutes before hundreds of miles below, blurred, and shadowy silver through the layer of air and clouds, dust and fog. Yes, it is quite easy for people to live on the earth; but to imagine people living on that huge, shining world in front of her, clear of all atmosphere, rain, fog or clouds to soften its hard, merciless brilliance, was impossible. And yet it was the most beautiful and exciting thing she had ever seen in her life. Martin patted her back reassuringly: he had this strange unreal feeling, too.

"Well, old lady," he said softly, "that's where we're bound for–we hope, as the Professor would say! It's easy now to see there are no rivers or water of any kind on the moon. But how different it looks! You know, I think we're going to have many surprises when we land, Jane." He nodded. "I'm sure of it. I wonder if I could see anything through my telescope."

"Let's try," Jane said excitedly, darting to the locker.

"Hey! Leave it alone," called Martin. "That's the only scientific instrument we've got with us."

"Oh, let me see, Martin! don't be so piggish," Jane answered, diving for the telescope.

"You can look through it when I've fixed it, but don't touch it," Martin told her.

Poor Jane was becoming used to obeying Martin blindly by now!

"Oh, dear," she thought, "he's beginning to change, too; he never ordered me about when he was on the earth! He wouldn't have dared."

Martin put his tripod carefully on the locker beside one of the hammocks and fitted the telescope into the little

brass brackets attached to the third leg of the stand and put his eye to the lens, turning the screw slowly.

"You can't see a great deal," he told Jane, "but much more, of course, than from the earth, because there's no vapour to break up the light. We're too far away to see much, and yet somehow it looks different; there seems to be a kind of coppery colour in patches that wasn't there before. Have a look and see what you think."

Jane took his place at the telescope.

"Yes, you're right; there is a funny coppery look about it. I wonder what it is?" she said, gazing through the lens.

"We'll see as we get nearer, of course: perhaps tomorrow; we'll be a few thousand miles nearer by then," he said, as if it was quite the usual thing to be a few thousand miles nearer the moon in a few hours' time! He was already beginning to feel an experienced interplanetary explorer.

Jane gave a long, slow yawn. She tried to lift her hand to rub her eyes, but it felt as if she had cramp: a peculiar numbness was stealing over her.

"I say, Martin," Jane said in a hushed voice, "do you feel a bit odd?"

"Yes," answered Martin, "I feel very odd indeed. I think we'd better get back to our hammocks."

He tried to move his legs; but the sensation of heaviness made it seem an age before he could lift his foot from the ground. He took Jane's arm with difficulty.

"I think I know what this is," he told her. "I read about it somewhere; it happens when you get to certain heights, we'll have to get to our hammocks somehow."

Jane started to go down on her hands and knees.

"Don't do that," warned Martin; "you'll never be able to get up again. Don't talk. Just hang on to me, and we'll get over as quickly as we can to the other side."

They clung to each other, and clumsily made their way across the cabin, dragging one foot after the other, but unable to move them far from the ground: it seemed hours before they reached their hammocks, Jane sank down, and with a tremendous effort managed to get her legs from the floor to the canvas bed. With this new problem to face, Martin had forgotten his precious telescope, and had left it standing on the locker. He suddenly remembered it.

"One thing is certain," he thought, "I'll have to go back and get it."

"I forgot to take down the telescope," he told Jane. "You'll be all right here, but don't move. I'll have to go across and get it somehow."

"Martin, leave it!" said Jane, "leave it; you'll never be able to get back again. If you go, I'll go, too," she threatened.

"No, you won't; you'll stay where you are," he ordered, and slowly and laboriously turned his back on her.

He half shut his eyes, as the objects in the cabin reeled round him, making him faint and giddy as the blood congealed in his veins. He tried to fix his eyes on the telescope silhouetted against the window opposite him, but everything appeared to move quicker than he did as he dragged his feet heavily over the floor, the sweat running down into his eyes, tasting salt as it trickled into the corners of his half-open mouth; but the odd thing was that his brain remained perfectly clear in spite of the awful giddiness: he knew where he was and what he wanted to do.

He put his hand out slowly. Instead of feeling into space, he touched the cold metal of the tripod. He could have sworn he was several feet away from it. There was

something very reassuring about the feel of the iron against his damp, slow-moving fingers as they crept over the tripod leg and touched the cardboard roll of the telescope.

He grasped it with both hands, expecting to find the weight enormous, but it weighed no more than a roll of cardboard and small metal rings devoid of blood-vessels should weigh. Clasping this precious object in his arms, he started on his way back to his pilot's hammock. He seemed to be looking at Jane through the wrong end of a telescope. She looked miles away, a small creature moving slowly round and round. He took a deep breath and called out to her.

"Are you all right, Jane?" He brought the words out slowly and distinctly.

"Yes," she called back to him. "Can I help you?"

Her voice sounded a long way off.

He shook his head in the same heavy way in which he moved, and closed his eyes a second or two against the reeling cabin. He felt himself being pulled forward, and pitched head first into his hammock.

When he opened his eyes everything was still. Jane looked her normal size and was close to him; half leaning out of her hammock, with anxious eyes peering through a dark, damp curl that fell over her face. She touched his shoulders gently. He smiled up at her, still holding his telescope, and tried to collect his thoughts.

"Here," said the ever practical Jane, holding one of the tubes from the water-tanks close to him, "drink that."

He put the drinking-tube in his mouth and drank thirstily. Now that he was back in his hammock the awful weight seemed to have lifted. He swung his feet to the ground with great difficulty: although the giddiness had vanished, a lot of the weightiness was still there.

"I wonder how long this is going to last," he said. "I know that just after this we'll have the reverse feeling."

"What do you mean by 'the reverse feeling'?" Jane asked anxiously.

"Well, we just won't weigh anything," Martin told her–"or, at least, we'll weigh very little. That's why we'll have to be strapped in. I didn't think that heaviness was going to feel so bad. It's much better lying down, though: you can move your arms quite well."

He waved his arms slowly over his head.

Jane curled herself round in her hammock and waited for the next strange thing to happen. She felt prepared for anything now, and her confidence in Martin had grown to such an extent that she no longer felt the slightest resentment at being ordered about.

She watched him take a little red note-book and a pencil out of the back pocket of his trousers and settle himself in his pilot's seat with the book on his knee.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Make up my log," he answered. "I'm going to keep a log all through the journey. You see, things will happen to us that won't happen to the crew of the 'Luna'–they won't be caught as we were just now, because they will guard against it. They'll know what's going to happen more or less beforehand, but they won't know what it feels like. We know very little about what's going to happen to us till it happens: in one way our log is going to be more useful than the one they'll keep. I've packed several note-books, and I mean to put every little thing down that happens." He carefully dated the top of the page and glanced at the chronometer beside him and noted the time. "Now, don't talk," he added, scratching his nose.

"If you want to know how to spell a word, just ask

me," Jane said loftily: she could spell very well indeed, and knew that Martin spelt worse than anybody in his school! He grinned at her slyly over his shoulder.

"For once I needn't trouble how I spell," he answered.

"You never do," she said as a last shot, and settled herself comfortably, her eyes fixed on the great brilliant moon shining through the window.

Martin began his log, the first of its kind in history, slowly and deliberately. His hand was still heavy and awkward, but the dizziness had left him, and his brain worked clearly. He glanced at the speedometer and chronometer beside him, and then tested the oxygen pumps again. The only sounds were the turning of the leaves of his note-book and the gentle breathing of Jane in the hammock beside him: she had fallen asleep with her face turned to the moon.

Martin put his pencil between his teeth and leaned back in his canvas seat: it was impossible for him to lie down, as his feet were firmly strapped to the floor. For some minutes he sat watching the great luminous disk that flooded the cabin with its steel-blue light, then read the notes in his log book, adding a word here and there. As he read it his mind wandered back to the earth; and presently his eyes began to close and his head nodded: like his sister, he had fallen asleep as they rushed on through the night hundreds of miles from their native planet.

Chapter II

MARTIN woke with a start. Something floated by him and touched his face. He put his hand up, and caught it. It was Jane's handkerchief drifting slowly up to the ceiling of the cabin. He moved an inch or so off his seat, and found himself being drawn upwards, but his strapped feet kept him to the ground. His movements woke Jane, and she sat up in her hammock. Her coat, which she had left on the floor, was sailing round the cabin on its way to the ceiling!

"Martin!" she cried. "Look!"

They both stared upwards. Jane untied her hair-ribbon and sent it to follow the coat. It turned slowly in the air like a snake as it made its way to the roof of the cabin.

Martin took a piece of toffee out of his pocket and threw it into the air. Up it went slowly to join the other objects.

"That's what would happen to us if we weren't strapped in," Martin told her. "Don't try to get out of your hammock; just sit still. I don't know how long this will last, perhaps all the way to the moon. The Professor didn't think so though. Anyway, we'll see. It's better than that awful feeling we had before."

They sat and watched the unattached objects follow each other through the air up to the ceiling. By now the whole light had changed. The sky outside was still dark, but it became more luminous. The cabin, too, was lighter. The light was no longer blue and steely, but much whiter, as if a huge arc lamp was shining in on them. This light came in from the windows on the east side; the blue light had come from the west.

"Can you see out of the windows without unstrapping yourself, Jane?" asked Martin.

"Yes, I think so," she answered, wriggling up in her seat. "Yes, I can. Oh, it's all quite different! There aren't any stars, and the sky looks like bright moonlight–real moonlight, not that horrid blue. Can you hold on to something and look out of your window?"

Martin unstrapped one foot and raised himself until he was kneeling with one knee on the seat, and looked out on the strange sky.

There seemed to be another moon facing him, rising out of the inky space and lighting a huge area of the sky with waves of light so strong that they blotted out the stars, except one or two tiny points of light far, far away in the distance. This was the travellers' first sight of the dawn in space.

"It's the sun," said Martin; "it's rising in the east. It must be the sun; but what a different sun!"

"But the sun's golden, bright and golden; this is like the moon, only whiter. But you're right about the east. Did you know it was going to look like this?" she asked.

Martin shook his head.

"No, I didn't. I knew it wouldn't be as we see it from the earth, but I didn't know it would be white like this."

He craned his neck round to see farther out of the window.

"But why is it golden from the earth and white from here?" Jane said, with wrinkled forehead.

"Well," answered Martin, "the sun isn't gold really, as we used to see it–everyone knows that. The rays are all broken up by vapour, dust, and all kinds of things. You've seen a rainbow? Well, that's the sun's rays broken up by rain. All the same, I thought it was more yellow than this. See how much brighter it has become during the last few minutes."

He remained gazing out at the rising sun; then, like a loyal captain of his ship, he returned to his pilot's seat and took his log book out of his pocket and duly entered the account of the first morning of his voyage.

"I wonder how poor Scruff and Tessie are," said Jane in a sorrowful voice. "I heard Scruff growl just now, and Tessie has been crying. I wish we could get them out."

She looked over her shoulder at the closed locker across the cabin.

"If we stop losing and gaining weight and get back to normal we'll have them out at once. Perhaps presently things will change again. I wish they would, because I want to use my telescope to-night and see if those copper patches on the moon look any clearer," Martin answered, closing his log and carefully stowing it away in his pocket.

"Do you know, Martin, we haven't had anything to eat

since we left the earth at nine o'clock last night?" Jane said suddenly.

"Well, let's have breakfast. I feel hungry now you've talked about food," answered Martin.

They unscrewed the little food cylinders attached to the lockers and dropped the tablets into their mouths.

"They're rather nice," Martin said, crunching his breakfast. "I wonder what they're made of?"

"I asked the Professor, and he said they were dried meat and eggs all mixed together, and that two of them were enough for a meal." Jane put another into her mouth. "How many have you had?"

"Four," Martin laughed–"that's breakfast and lunch gone. I hope there's plenty of them."

"Yes, there's a stock in one of the lockers, if we can get at them," Jane told him, and took a long drink from the tube of the water-tank beside her.

Breakfast finished, they both settled down to see as much as they could through the windows. Martin was keeping a close watch on the coat and hair-ribbon, which were moving across the ceiling towards the spearhead door of the cabin, being pulled by the moon's gravity, but so far showed no sign of falling to the floor. His faith in the Professor was so great that he felt sure this state would not last the whole voyage.

By now the sky was shining with a curious unearthly brilliance. It was a world of darkness and light, with no softening tones to break up the harsh glare from the naked sun. Martin shivered at the thought that his and Jane's eyes were the first that had gazed at the sky as it really was, with no fairyland clouds of pink and purple at sunrise and sunset, and there would be no mysterious soft greens and greys of twilight: it would simply change from the white glare of the sun to the blue light from the

moon–a world terrible and wonderful, full of undreamt-of things.

A cry from Martin made Jane swing round quickly. He had risen to his feet, standing on tiptoe.

"The chronometer has stopped," he said. "It was five o'clock when I looked at it before breakfast: it's not moved." He bent over and looked at the speedometer. "The speedometer has stopped, too, and the aneroid barometer. We shall not know time, height or speed now all the way."

They stared at each other, wondering how serious it was, and whether any more of the instruments would go wrong as well.

"Do you think we'll just fall back on the earth?" Jane asked anxiously.

Martin shook his head.

"No, no. We can't do that now: we're clear of the earth and being pulled towards the moon. It means we won't know the time or the speed we're travelling at, that's all. Nothing to worry about really," he reassured her, but he wondered if anything would happen to the engines or motors.

He tested the oxygen pumps. They were all right. He longed to press the button to release the parachute wings, but dared not. How would he know when to release them without the aneroid barometer to tell him his height? He crossed his fingers and hoped.

Jane watched him in silence as he examined the switchboard over his locker. The tiny red light was still shining brightly, so he knew that so far the fuel-tanks were intact, but the feeling of the helplessness through having his feet strapped to the floor made him angry. He wanted to go through to the engine-room, test various parts of the apparatus, and try as well as he could to see that every-

thing was working. It is true he knew very little of the mechanism of the rocket, but he would know if things were working or not. The loss of the chronometer, though annoying, was not serious; but failure of the aneroid barometer might be a very serious matter; for the parachute wings must be released at a certain height or they might crash. He had no wish to add to the craters on the moon. A mournful howl from Scruff's locker added to his worries.

"Lie down, Scruff," he shouted, and wiped the little beads of sweat from his top lip. "There's nothing we can do," he added, sitting down in his pilot's seat. "We'll have to wait and see what happens." He smiled at Jane. "We can't expect it to go right all the way."

Jane nodded in agreement; she was getting so accustomed to strange happenings that they seemed almost the normal way of living.

The sun had risen, filling the cabin with a brilliant incandescent light. It's curious how unnatural unaccustomed things seem. This pure sunlight, with its red, yellow and blue rays unbroken, seemed artificial, and yet, seeing the rays filtering through the earth's atmosphere, the spectrum broken up by millions of particles, it had seemed right, as if that was the way the sun should look. Jane sighed a little as she watched the cold brilliance round her, so different from the soft, kindly earth that she had left far behind her.

A "plop" brought both the travellers back from their day-dreams. Jane's coat had fallen to the floor.

Martin was out of his seat and had his feet unstrapped the instant he heard it.

"Now we can do something," he cried joyfully.

Jane dashed across the cabin and opened the locker lid. Out bounded Scruff, barking and jumping excitedly

round them, nearly mad with joy at being free once more. He was followed by Tessie, who climbed carefully out, stretched herself and then began calmly washing her paws.

"The Professor said this might happen," said Martin as he clambered on a locker and unscrewed the barometer case. "It's no use trying to make this thing work now," he went on, "but I might learn something that will be useful later." He worked away for some minutes, then screwed the case up and jumped down. "No. No help there. We'll have to leave it to luck."

"Anyway, we're still going," Jane told him helpfully.

"Of course we're still going, silly," he answered. "We can't help it. The only thing is how far are we going? And how shall I know when to open the parachute wings for landing? That's what's worrying me."

He scratched his head and stared out of the window, his mind busy with many problems. Suppose they overshot the moon: the Professor had assured him that "every little thing had been set so that they should not", but here were three important instruments completely useless already. As long as the oxygen tubes were intact he felt confident he could navigate the rocket safely to her lunar harbour. However, it was no use thinking about it; he'd have to wait.

While Jane was playing with Scruff and Tessie and giving them a drink out of the water-bottles, Martin went through to the engine-room. Everything seemed in order there, and his spirits rose once again. After all, he thought, I can move about now, and it is unlikely that there will be any more changes in weight. He closed the engine-room door and went back to his seat and entered the first accident of the voyage in his log book.

The day wore on cheerfully. Scruff had found himself a

"ghost rat" underneath one of the lockers, and scratched and blew in the corner at intervals. Tessie picked her way daintily over everything and explored corners of the cabin. At last, tired of jumping up and down and crawling underneath hammocks, she settled down in Jane's lap and fell asleep.

Martin set to work and made his first thorough examination of the cabin; every locker was searched in the hope that something had been stowed away that would be useful to them; but it was as the Professor had said, all the weight was made up with ballast. As soon as Martin saw the first sack of ballast sand he remembered that in their hurry to hide away they had forgotten to throw out the sacks to correspond with the weight of themselves and their stores. This meant that they were travelling many pounds over-weight. How this would affect them he had no idea, but he thought grimly he'd no idea how anything would affect them until it did!

"There's one thing I must do before it gets too dark," he told Jane as they were having one of their meals–as they had no idea of the time, they just ate when they were hungry–"and that is to fix my telescope. I wish I had something to stand the tripod on; the windows are a bit too high to see out properly."

He looked round the cabin in search of something that might serve as a stand.

"What about that box over there?" asked Jane, pointing to the far corner.

"Where?" Martin asked.

"Under that hammock by the engine-room door," she told him.

"How on earth did I miss that?" he cried.

"Well, you aren't on the earth," giggled Jane.

Martin tugged at the large mahogany box, which was

strapped to the floor, and at last managed to draw it out from under the hammock.

"Wonder what's in it," said Jane, shooing Tessie on to the floor and running over to Martin.

"We'll soon see," he said, lifting the lid and peering inside.

"Why!" exclaimed Jane, "it's a wireless set!"

Martin stared down at the mass of coils and switches. This was indeed a find.

"It's a sort of transmitting set," he told Jane. "I'll bet they left it by mistake. We'll be able to send messages to the earth!"

He dragged the heavy wooden case out in the middle of the cabin and sat cross-legged on the floor.

"But do you know how to work it?" Jane asked him.

He shook his head slowly.

"No. I've only seen one in my life. It wasn't like this one, though. That was in a Radio Exhibition. But I'll soon find out how it works."

"If it does work," said Jane. "It might be broken like the other things."

"No, I don't think so," Martin answered, "as it was disconnected. The other things went wrong because they wouldn't stand the height; but this was simply packed away. Anyway, I'm not going to mess about with it while we're on the journey. We'll wait till we get on the moon." He began carefully to examine his find. "What a bit of luck we found it!"

" 'We'," echoed Jane; "it wasn't 'we' at all, it was 'I' who found it. You were poking about here all day and didn't find anything," she went on indignantly.

Martin looked round with a grin.

"All right, you found it. Anyway, I'll have to work it."

They were too intent on examining their newly found

treasure to notice the change in the light: instead of the cold, white glare that flooded the cabin, the sky was darkening so rapidly that it was as if a huge thundercloud was passing the sun. They left their case of switches, coils and steel to watch the incredible sight that was taking place outside the windows.

The great white globe was sinking, while they watched it, into the inky blackness of the sky, throwing off hard circles of red, yellow, and blue light carefully drawn as if by chalk: there was no soft blending of colours, as with a rainbow, but three distinct rings, throwing no afterglow as the sun set in a sky as dark as midnight.

And so the two adventurers watched the close of their first day in space.

Chapter III

By the time Martin had fixed his tripod and telescope firmly on the radio case, the moon had risen: in fact, before the sun had completely disappeared the great blue globe crept up through the darkness and the stars shone with hard, unwinking light. The cold, frosty beauty of this new world of light and darkness, devoid of all half-tones, was beginning to grow on the travellers. Seen from the earth through the kindly, softening haze it had seemed "pretty" compared with the breath-taking magnificence they looked out on hour after hour.

Jane had dipped into the stores and produced a slab of chocolate, which she divided between them, cautioning Martin to "make it last", and was now sitting curled up on the floor watching him adjust his telescope.

"You know," he said, turning the screws carefully, "those copper patches look entirely different to-night.

They seem to be more greenish than copper. Somehow they don't look like shadows any longer. See what you think."

He stepped back so that she could take his place. She looked for some minutes without speaking.

"Yes, you're right. You can see quite a lot with this telescope. I suppose with the one the Professor will bring with him you could see everything there is on the moon," she said, keeping her eye on the lens. "May I turn it round a little and see some of the stars?"

She dared not touch his precious telescope without full permission.

"No, don't mess about with it," he answered. "I'll focus you a star, and then you can look." He turned the lens and screws for a few moments. "Here you are."

"I can't see anything except a glaring light," she told him in disgust. "Just light and nothing else."

She went on staring at the great brilliant star shining down on her.

"Most of the stars are too far away to see much," Martin told her, taking her place at the telescope. "Anyway, it's the moon we want to look at, not the stars."

He gazed up at the enormous planet which was to be his temporary home. The changes in the moon's appearance were now very marked. There were distinct discolorations of a curious greenish-bronze colour; every hour of the flight made them sharper and more clearly defined. Perhaps everyone was wrong, Martin thought, his heart beating faster. Certainly the moon looked anything but the dead world he had always imagined it to be. Could anything really live up there on that cold, icy planet? Was it possible that there was some weird and strange plant that grew in the harsh ash that made up the moon's substance? Or some undreamt-of living

creature which crawled or burrowed its way across the dry surface? Surely no boy had stranger thoughts than those that were running through Martin's head, and certainly no boy had the knowledge that his dreams would be realised; for this was exploration beyond even his wildest dreams. "Nothing can go wrong," he thought recklessly: "nothing can stop a safe landing–nothing, nothing." He set his teeth firmly as he remembered the loss of his chronometer and aneroid barometer. These things were unimportant, he told himself. His faith in the "Luna I" was as great as his friend's, the Professor.

Jane yawned, and twitched her hair-ribbon along the floor, trying to induce Tessie to play, but, after the manner of cats, Tessie kept her eyes in the other direction and pretended not to see it. Poor Jane was beginning to feel a little bored. Scruff was sound asleep, tired out from his rat-hunting, Martin stared at the moon hour after hour without speaking, and now even Tessie refused to take any notice of her. She looked out dreamily into the dark, star-dusted space, thinking of the earth she had left, not of the moon she would soon be exploring.

A sudden cry from Jane made Martin wheel round.

"Quick!" she called, "come quickly, look!"

She was kneeling in her hammock, pressing her face to the window.

Martin sprang up beside her to watch yet another amazing spectacle.

Far away in the inky distance a blinding incandescent light was racing across the sky, its long tail making a semicircle of light and throwing off millions of tiny sparks. Nearer and nearer the terrifying object came, dazzling their eyes and making them both hold their breath in wonder. It seemed nothing could stop a collision in space with this monster of light and speed. Jane gripped Mar-

tin's arm, but he wrenched it free and bounded across the cabin to his telescope.

"I must see what it is," he cried, with his telescope pressed to his eye. "It's a comet, of course; but those stars splitting up round it–I want to see what happens to them."

This was the first menace they had encountered, and neither of them realised how serious this encounter might be, or what action it might have on their journey. Martin passed the telescope to Jane, but she shook her head impatiently and covered her eyes: the nearer the terrifying object came the more uncertain was the hope of survival.

Its size and speed never varied as it rushed silently through the inky sky, followed by its fiery tail. Past the windows and far below the rocket the giant comet flew on its passage through space. Some of the fragments from its tail would be seen months later from the earth as "shooting stars", others would be burnt up long before they were visible to earthly eyes.

"It's gone," said Martin, with a sigh of relief. "I thought we were finished that time." He laughed shakily. "I was never so scared in my life," he admitted.

"I'll never be so scared again," answered Jane–"at least, I hope I won't. Anyway, it's gone now. I wonder if we're going to see any more of those awful things?"

"We'll see lots of awful things, I expect, before we're back on the earth again," he answered cheerfully, feeling relieved that one more danger was over. "But," he crossed his fingers above his head and added, "we hope . . .!"

"I wonder if we can see anything through the floor window?" asked Jane, going down on her hands and knees to the metal plate in the middle of the cabin.

Martin followed her, and lifted the heavy lid. Nothing could be seen but dense blackness. A tiny star broke through for an instant and then disappeared, burnt out by the intense heat of the speed on its passage through space. Martin closed the lid, and they both returned to their hammocks, feeling limp and exhausted from the strain and anxiety of the last few minutes. Jane leaned back and stared up at the ceiling.

"What a quiet, peaceful place the earth is!" she remarked, a little regretful at leaving it.

"Quiet? Peaceful?" Martin echoed. "Think of the wars, think of the earthquakes, think of some of the things Father used to tell us. There's much more peace here. The only bit of danger or trouble we've had so far has been one little comet!" he added contemptuously, defending the New World which he was discovering hour by hour.

After entering the incident of the comet in his log, Martin went again on a round of inspection, testing tubes and pumps. Another visit to the engine-room satisfied him that all was in working order. The altimeter was not working, and the hands of the chronometer were still pointing to five o'clock. His inspection completed, he returned to his post.

The night wore on without any particular event. Martin surveyed the moon several times, but there were few changes in its appearance. A star released from the comet flashed through the sky, drawn by some force towards the earth, and left the blackness more dense than ever. He glanced at his crew: Jane was sleeping peacefully, with one hand under her head, with Scruff and Tessie curled up beside her. His heavy eyes began to close as he settled himself in his pilot's seat, and in spite of his efforts to keep awake he soon followed his companions' example.

A growl from Scruff woke Martin. He rubbed his eyes and looked round the cabin. Jane gave the growling dog a little slap and settled to sleep again, but Martin was wide awake, feeling quite refreshed after his short nap. He took out his log book and read over the strange incidents that had occurred since he had left the earth.

While he was reading he noticed a change in the light: it came from one of the windows at the far end of the cabin, a curious light that seemed even brighter than the sun. He crossed quietly to see what was causing it. The comet had been a terrifying sight, but the object approaching them now was a thousand times more terrifying.

In the midst of the airless darkness there appeared an enormous globe. It was like another moon; but a full moon, and of an incandescent brilliance far more intense. Through the blackness of space it travelled at a speed many times greater than that of the comet. Martin turned quickly and looked through another window. There was the moon shining steadily, flooding the cabin with light that seemed almost dim compared with the merciless glare from this globe, which was heading straight towards the nose of the rocket. Scruff, still growling, jumped off Jane's hammock and ran to Martin with tail erect and the hair on his back bristling. He seemed to scent danger in that queer supernatural way dogs have. He ran backwards and forwards, first to Martin and then to Jane, his sense of protection growing with each warning growl.

Jane sat up crossly.

"Whatever is the matter with Scruff?" she asked sleepily.

Martin pointed through the window without speaking, and she ran across to him.

"What is it?" she whispered in fear. "Oh, what can it be?"

Martin shook his head.

"I don't know, unless it's a meteor. I think it must be; something to do with that comet, but it's heading straight for us." He patted her shoulder. "It's no use losing our heads; the comet passed us."

The meteor–for Martin was right–was cutting straight across the rocket's path, and it seemed only the matter of a few seconds before it would crash through their spearhead; its speed was impossible to calculate as it rushed onwards, its size growing every second.

In spite of the courage of the travellers, they were silent and motionless with fear. It seemed as if they were rushing headlong towards an abyss of white-hot fire as they half shut their eyes against the glare from the asteroid. Martin and Jane held each other's hands tightly. Their brains stopped working, and they clung to each other; only Scruff growling at their feet broke the silence.

The cabin was lighted by a brilliant flash as the asteroid seemed to strike the spearhead of the rocket. The ball of white-hot fire burst like a bomb, but without sound in that void where sound cannot be generated.

Millions of luminous fragments lit up the space around the "Luna I" with the brilliance of their fire. In a few seconds all that was left of the asteroid were the white-hot fragments flying in all directions, becoming small asteroids that crossed each other and struck, scattering even smaller fragments of light and heat, splitting up into tiny pin-points of colour, some forming candelabras of the most beautiful shapes and patterns before they faded into space thousands of miles below the rocket;

others darting points of light like luminous spearheads, disappearing into the darkness.

The sky returned to its darkness, the stars, which had been eclipsed by the brilliance of the asteroid, appeared one by one, and the moon was a calm and friendly planet shining through the night.

Jane sank weakly to her knees, gathering Scruff in her arms and ruffling his rough, warm fur. She watched Martin wiping his forehead with his jersey-covered arm. Everything that happened seemed worse than the last. The boy and girl explorers went back silently to their hammocks, Jane with the firm resolve that this was going to be her last exploration, Martin more convinced than ever that this was his first–and that there were going to be many to follow it. After all, meteors, to travellers through space, are like sand-banks and icebergs to sailors: except, of course, interplanetary explorers have no way of escape from them, and no means of dealing with the unforeseen happenings that might arise from these encounters. But Martin had no complaints. He knew he would see things that no human being had ever seen before, and that soon he would know the answers to questions so far insoluble.

"What's for supper, Jane?" he asked cheerfully.

Jane came to her senses with a jerk.

"I think we'd better finish these tablets, and save our food for when we get on the moon," she answered. "If we get there," she added.

"If we get there," scoffed Martin. "Why on earth shouldn't we get there?"

"On earth there didn't seem any reason why we shouldn't," she remarked over her shoulder as she unscrewed the food cylinders. She was still feeling a little on edge. "I believe you are enjoying all these awful things."

"Poor old Jane!" said Martin, coming across to her and hugging her.

Scruff jumped round delightedly, and Tessie woke up, yawned, and stretched. They were all soon back in their cheerful spirits again, and Martin, with a final pull at Jane's curls, stretched himself flat on his back in his hammock, crunching the crisp little tablets.

"Of course," Martin said with his mouth full, "this is the worst part of the whole trip. Once we get on the moon we'll be all right: things like this were bound to happen." He turned the food cylinder upside down and shook it. " I say, I've eaten the lot!" he added, throwing the empty tube on the floor.

"There's quite a lot left," Jane assured him. "We haven't started on those tubes by the other lockers yet." She screwed the cap on her cylinder carefully and settled herself down in the hammock. "I suppose if we'd hit that meteor we'd have been blown to bits," she said with a shudder.

"Oh, yes," Martin agreed cheerfully. "We had an awfully lucky escape really, because if we'd been directly in its path we would have been drawn towards it–at least, I should think so–and very likely have followed it until it exploded."

"I suppose some of the bits of it are still flying about and will become stars. It's difficult to believe that such lovely things as stars begin with anything as awful as that thing," she went on, looking out of the window at the millions of brilliant, unwinking lights in the airless space beyond.

"Well, they don't all start that way; but thank goodness it's gone now, or we might have got mixed up with it and gone on circling round and round in space for ever."

He little knew how near the truth he was.

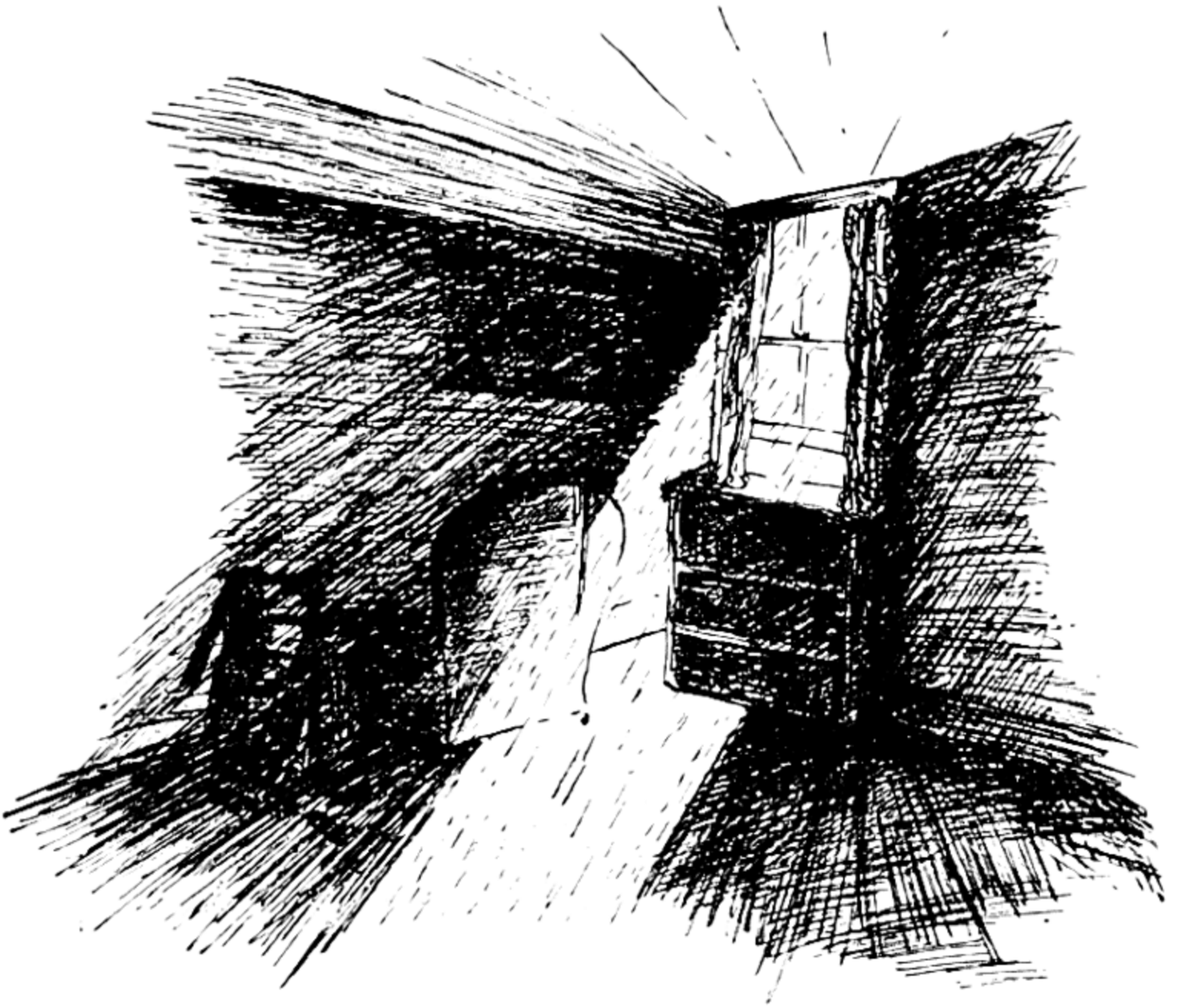
Martin returned to his pilot's seat and his log book, which was more than half full of his sprawling account of this wonderful journey–a log that was to become the most famous in history, and would one day take its place in a glass-topped case carefully guarded by an attendant in a museum along with other written accounts of famous explorations; a log of the first human being to voyage to another planet.

He stowed the little red note-book away in his pocket, yawned, stretched, and then went over to his telescope. It was some hours since he had viewed his future destination, and he wondered what changes had taken place; for, having no means of telling time or altitude, he would have to rely on his own judgment about opening the parachute wings.

He stopped suddenly, staring through the window in front of him. Where he had seen the shining orb of the moon an hour or two ago was now inky black. He crossed quickly to another window and pulled up the shutter; but still only blackness met his troubled eyes. Each window shutter that he pulled up showed the same result. He climbed on one of the lockers and opened the roof shutter: the moon came streaming in, almost blinding him with its fierce light.

He jumped down quietly without waking Jane, and sat for some minutes chewing his finger-nail. He had no idea what had gone wrong, but within a few hours, instead of being drawn towards the moon, they were being drawn away from it. It seemed almost as if they had gone beyond it. But that couldn't have happened. He took his telescope and climbed up on the locker again. A hasty glance showed him a completely different aspect of the moon's face: it seemed to be almost full, its great shoulders shining down on him with intense brilliance. It was

obvious that their course had changed. The meteor had not completely passed them; some fragment from it was drawing them. . . . Martin stared through the eye-glass at the huge planet above him. There was only a small part in shadow. He lowered the telescope as the horrifying thought rushed into his brain: they were racing towards the sun.



Chapter IV

THE grey light of early morning filtered through the half-opened window on the sleeping figure hunched in the armchair. A small, black, pointed beard stuck out from one end of the plaid travelling rug, and a socked foot with a hole in the toe from the other. Not even the slightest snore broke the silence of the room or the smallest movement from the worn-out sleeping man disturbed the stillness. The Professor was having his first few hours sleep since the launching of the "Luna I". It was only when he began to see two telescopes when he knew there was only one that his common sense came to his rescue, and he realised that a man with a tired brain and dimmed wits was worse than no man at all; so reluctantly he abandoned his post and shut himself up in his tiny office

high above the house-tops in the Observatory, only removing his collar and shoes before he threw himself down with a weary sigh, vowing he would not sleep a second, which of course he did before the second was half finished; and not moving a muscle until the daylight fell on his face and he opened his eyes with sleepy vagueness, and shivered slightly.

He got up and stretched his cramped limbs as he walked to the window and opened it wide, letting in the fresh wind and some dried leaves from the tree-tops outside. He stood leaning out over the sill until the soft sound of the door opening behind him made him jerk his head back into the room. The head and shoulders of a tall, thin young man with heavy horn-rimmed spectacles came cautiously round the door: it was Henry Horton, the Professor's able and devoted assistant.

"I thought I heard you moving," he said, shutting the door behind him. "I've asked Jackson to bring up some coffee."

"How thoughtful of you, Henry!" said the Professor; "but you think of everything. What would I do without you? But haven't you been to bed? What's the time? Have you been walking up and down the corridors all night?" he went on, hunting for his shoes.

"Yes, I've been to bed," Henry answered, "but I came back about an hour ago. It's only a step from my lodgings, you know; and the time is," glancing at his watch, "five fifty-eight and a half minutes."

Henry was a very accurate young man.

A tremendous thud at the door announced Jackson the night porter, and coffee. He entered majestically behind a huge tray loaded with an odd assortment of cups and mugs, a blue enamelled coffee-pot, a tin of condensed

milk, and three-quarters of a plum cake. He deposited his load on the desk with a bang.

"There you are, Professor, corfee, nice and 'ot and strong, plenty of condensed milk and what's left of the missus's cake: now come along, 'ave it while it's 'ot."

Jackson had known the Professor since he was a very young student, and always bullied him affectionately. Although he had watched the Professor's steady climb to fame, to him he was always "that young Erdleigh wot don't take care of 'imself".

"That breakfast is the first good sight I've had for days, Jackson," the Professor told him. "I should just think I would have it while it's hot, and Mrs. Jackson's cakes are always a great treat."

He poured out two cups of coffee, and was soon sipping one noisily.

"Well, if you want anything else just 'oller," said Jackson as he lumbered out of the room, braces dangling, and leaving a scent of strong tobacco behind him.

"I suppose there's no news?" the Professor asked anxiously when he and Henry were settled with their coffee.

Henry shook his head dismally.

"I know you always call me a confirmed optimist–perhaps I am–but I refuse to give up all hope of news," the Professor went on between sips of scalding coffee.

"But we've lost all track of them," said Henry. "We lost track of them two nights ago. All our efforts to pick them up have been useless." He polished his spectacles. "Useless," he repeated gloomily.

"I don't agree, Henry," the Professor answered severely. "They have not been useless. The methods we used may have been without effect. Well, we'll try others. We've learnt a great deal from these methods you call

useless, if only to know that they are useless. Last night I might have agreed with you about the hopelessness of the flight, but it would have been the hopelessness of a tired man; this morning, after some sleep–and Jackson's excellent coffee–I'm no longer a tired man, and I have hope. Hope always comes in the morning, Henry: we can see and think clearly in the daylight."

The Professor cut himself a third slice of cake with deliberation.

"Have you any new method of communication in mind?" Henry asked rather timidly.

The Professor shook his head.

"None," he answered. "None whatever. But I have a theory as to what might have happened, and a vague–vague at present–idea of the result if my theory proves correct." He felt in his pockets and glanced round the room. "Give me a cigarette, Henry, there's a good lad; mine are somewhere under something else."

They both settled themselves down with a fresh cup of coffee and cigarettes.

"Now, let's go over things in the right order since the flight," said the Professor after a pause.

"All mechanism tested–I did that myself–everything in perfect order. Take-off just as we had planned–at least, apart from those two hare-brained children: we certainly hadn't planned that. We picked up the automatic signals from the 'Luna I' and were in communication with her from our end in a perfectly straight course for–well, the amount of hours slip my mind, but it's noted on my chart. In fact, there was not one thing to show that the flight would go wrong in any way. Then came the encounter with the comet. A thousand to one chance that it should have occurred; but still there was always that one chance. Well, we know for certain that the rocket

passed outside any danger area, as we picked up signals from her many hours afterwards."

"Do you think——" broke in Henry.

"Don't interrupt me," snapped the Professor. "We picked up her signals, which showed she was still running her normal course." He began pacing the room. "Now we come to the second encounter. The meteor. And that has been the cause of the disappearance of the 'Luna I'."

He came back to his chair.

"Could the meteor have been some off-shoot of the comet?" enquired Henry.

"My dear Henry!" exclaimed the Professor. "Where have your wits gone? Think of the short space of time between them: a matter of hours. No fragment from the comet could have gathered enough power in that short space of time. No, this was an entirely separate thing; and also coming from a slightly different direction."

He relighted his cigarette.

"The natural assumption is, of course, that they collided," Henry answered.

The Professor nodded.

"The natural assumption is that. But there is another theory. We know that an explosion took place–some of the fragments, and large ones, were seen for hours afterwards; I still traced some early this morning before I slept. Not that my eyes or brain were clear enough to make certain; but I feel pretty sure. Well, suppose one of those larger fragments had found its way into the path of the rocket: crossed it, in fact. Remember it would be heavily charged and travelling at a tremendous speed, gathering strength all the way. The natural assumption is that the fragment re-directed the rocket, throwing her out of her course and cutting off our communication line.

And that, my dear boy, is what I think has happened."

He leaned forward, looking at Henry intently.

There was a silence for some minutes.

"In that case," said Henry quietly, "the 'Luna I' is lost in space, and will eventually become a satellite of whichever planet it is drawn towards." He shut his eyes and shivered. "Together with its passengers."

"Not necessarily so," answered the Professor. "There is a chance still of survival. You know I always believe in chance. That fragment will in all probability split. In that case the 'Luna I' will be drawn towards the strongest fragment. Now, the explosion was near enough to the moon for some of the fragments from the meteor to be drawn towards it. If the rocket is following one of these, it merely means that it will land on a different part of the moon than the one we had set course for. If, on the other hand, it is following a fragment flying away from the moon, the only hope is for that fragment to split, part of it following in the opposite direction and re-directing the rocket's course. Do you follow me?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, perfectly," answered Henry hastily. "That was a theory I hadn't thought of. I see it's quite possible. I wonder if the boy realises what's happened?"

"He'll probably notice the difference in the position he is in relation to the moon," said the Professor. "I hope with all my heart he does not, though: it's not a pleasant thought to know you are lost in space with no means of directing your craft."

The sun was shining its pale autumn light full on the Professor. Henry noticed for the first time how grey his hair had grown, and the little inky beard showed up in sharp contrast with the white-streaked head above it. A week ago he looked many years younger than his forty-five years; this morning he looked many years older.

"The one thing we must guard against is anything about this getting into the newspapers. It was no fault of ours that that boy and girl took it into their heads to stow away; but the public would never take that into account–the outcry would be frightful, and once we have public opinion against us we're finished. As soon as we know one way or another, we can publish the story, but for the time being at all costs we must see there is no leakage about the disappearance." The Professor threw up his hands. "No matter how deeply we feel about it, it wouldn't make the slightest difference."

"Have you told their parents?" Henry enquired.

"Yes. At least, their father: he came to see me yesterday. I also told him the other theory of re-direction. He is a man you can absolutely trust, and he would give us any assistance he could–in fact, if everything turns out as we pray to God it will and we take our rescue party, I have a strong feeling that we'll have him as a passenger. You must meet him, Henry. He's a man after my own heart. I only hope I can be the means of restoring his son and daughter to him."

The Professor looked out of the window for a long while at the tree-tops in the distance from Greenwich Park, and the swiftly running, white clouds, and at the sparrows perched on the telegraph wires outside his windows. Henry sat motionless staring at the carpet: he always knew when to keep quiet.

"Well, action!" exclaimed the Professor, springing to his feet. "I'm going to call a meeting this morning. Let me see, what time, now, will be best?" He wrinkled his nose. "Eleven-thirty, I think; that gives everyone time to have breakfast." He grinned, knowing the hour his colleagues usually arrived. "Now, Henry, will you sit yourself by your telephone and collect everyone for me? I

think, er–yes: Dr. Mcneice, Dr. Braska. Oh, and Professor Hawkins. We'll have to have Dr. Leeds, of course. Yes, I think that's the lot. I'd like you to be there, too, if you can manage it: I can never read my own notes afterwards. You might explain the object of the meeting is to discuss the disappearance of the 'Luna I' from a different angle. If they think they are going to learn something fresh they might arrive in time." He began to tie his shoelaces. "A bath is what I badly need." He looked up with a grin. "But there's little hope."

Henry took out his bunch of keys and carefully extracted one and handed it to the Professor.

"It will take you five minutes to walk to my lodgings. There's lots of hot water, soap and towels–and plenty of cigarettes."

As the Professor had predicted, the thought of learning something new about the great expedition made the learned scientific professors arrive dead on time for the meeting: indeed, nothing would have kept them away.

The Professor was standing at the head of the long, leather-topped table in one of the meeting-rooms, with Henry sitting by his side taking notes in his rapid shorthand. The four pairs of eyes never left his face all through the meeting, while he explained the theory of the disappearance he had already told Henry earlier in the morning.

"And that," he said in conclusion, "is what I feel is the most probable theory of what has happened to the 'Luna I'."

He sat down and took a long drink of water. He glanced round at the four men who were seated round him–men who were learned and wise and who had lived for science all their lives.

"Yes, yes, I agree it's most probable." "I think you're

right, Professor." "There's little doubt you've hit it, Erdleigh." "I'm inclined to agree with the Professor."

All the four men spoke at once, firing their remarks at the alert-looking Professor, fresh after his sleep and bath and ready to tackle any problem as it arose.

"Do you mean to abandon attempts at communication?" asked Dr. Braska in guttural, broken English.

"No, no," answered the Professor quickly–"by no means. We'll keep on trying day and night, for in the event of the 'Luna I' changing course and returning to her line we could pick her up once more."

"In the event of the rocket landing on another part of the moon could we pick her up?" asked Dr. Mcneice.

"Yes, oh yes; but of course it all depends on her apparatus being intact: if it should have suffered in any way–and some of the apparatus is very delicate–there's no hope of picking her up at all. There is a transmitting set on board, but whether the boy will be able to use it is another matter. We'll have to keep a strict watch on the moon; but we must be prepared for long and weary waiting, and it's possible that if they do land safely it will be on a part of the moon where we shall not be able to see the flash; or, again, the spearhead might have suffered from electric contact. We knew long ago–at the beginning of the plans for the expedition–all these things might happen; and at this stage of experiment it is impossible to guard against them. If only these children survive and their craft reaches a safe harbour they will be able to assist science to a remarkable extent."

The Professor's face clouded as he spoke of his two friends, lost and at the mercy of the cruel elements.

The meeting, which had lasted into the early afternoon, broke up amidst handshakes and encouragement from the Professor's friends, for they well knew what the

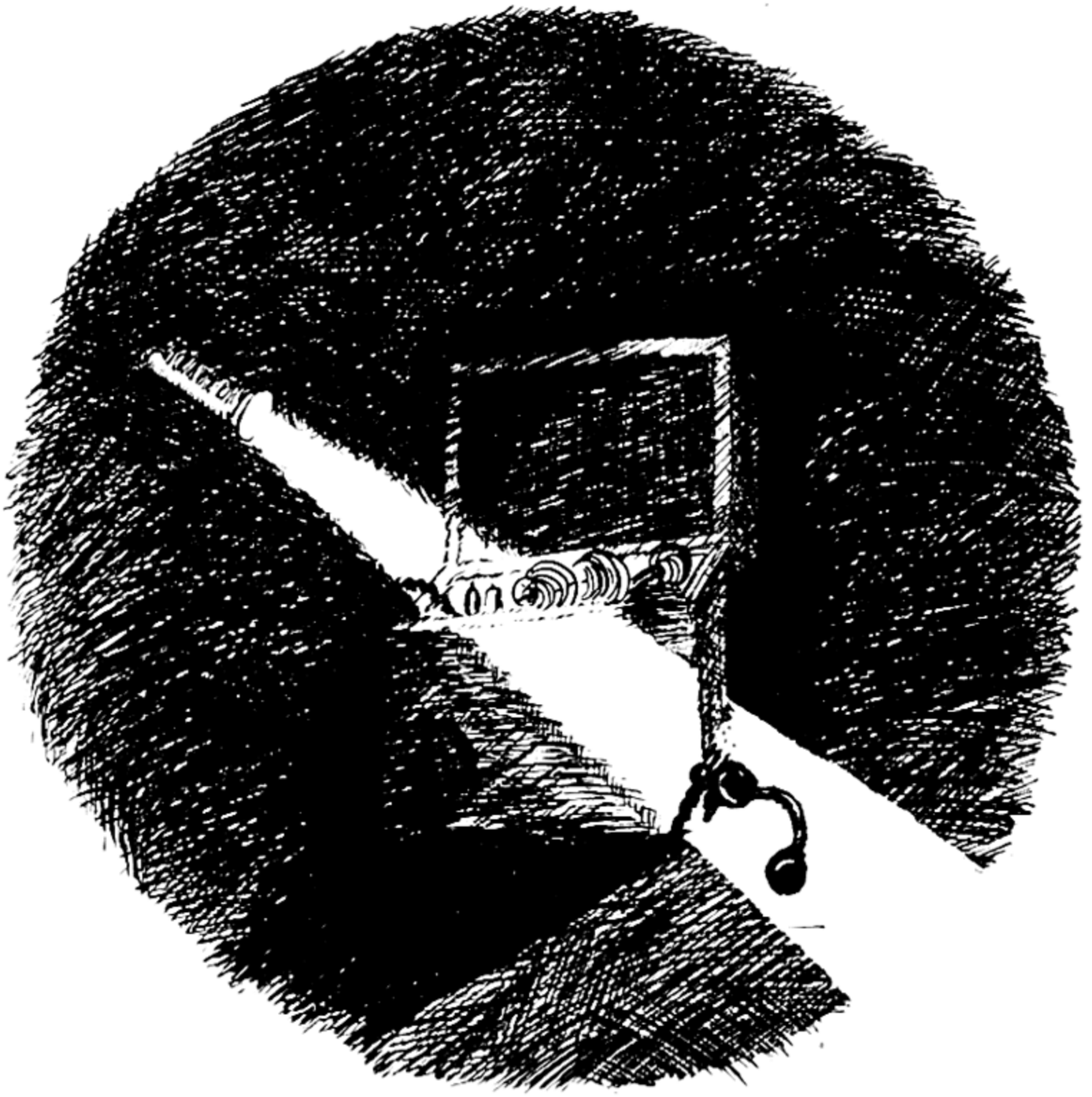
success of the expedition meant to him, and how deeply he felt about the plight of the two courageous travellers who were soaring their way through space.

"Well, that's over," sighed the Professor, once again back in his untidy little office. He lighted his inevitable cigarette and threw the crumpled packet across to Henry.

"Shall I send along the order for some lunch?" Henry asked anxiously: he knew how little food the Professor had had during the last few days.

"Eat? Food?" returned the Professor. "Great heavens! it would choke me. No, no, Henry; just a sandwich, or some bread and cheese. I'm going up to the dome. Perhaps the porter will bring me something I can eat while I'm working. You need not look as if you were preparing for my funeral," he laughed. "I'm a tough old bird, you know. I'll tell you what. When we see that red flash, or have a sign that the 'Luna I' has landed safely, we'll go out and have the most enormous dinner together we've ever had in our lives. There! You know I never break a promise." He patted Henry's shoulder. "Now I'm off; you know where I'll be. You had a stiff day yesterday, so take it easily to-day. There's little you can do: little any of us can, for that matter, but keep our patience and our faith."

He smiled over his shoulder as he left the office on his way to the huge glass dome, to his telescopes and his long watching.



Chapter V

THE hours, days, and nights since the "Luna I" changed her course had become simply undivided time: it was now impossible to distinguish night from day. As the rocket rushed on in its uncontrolled flight, the burning glare from the sun's rays became more intense. All window shutters were closed against it, apart from one at the farthest end of the cabin which Martin, his eyes shaded by dark glasses, used as a look-out post. He made frequent trips to the windows with his telescope and eagerly scanned the glaring space beyond him; but always returned to his pilot's seat with the same report, "Nothing

in sight". He made his usual inspection of the fuel-tanks and engine-room, tested oxygen tubes and shutters, feeling it was a useless task; but at times the knowledge that he was shut up and incapable of doing anything to redirect their course made him feel savage, and he welcomed any small thing that meant exertion. Both the marooned travellers loyally hid their anxiety from each other, but their hearts were heavy and their eyes tired from watching. Jane dropped off in a doze now and then, but Martin felt he would never sleep again, as he rubbed his red-rimmed eyes, smarting from lack of sleep.

All the portable objects in the cabin slipped gradually towards the opposite wall as the rocket was drawn to the white-hot planet which was now the destination of the doomed "Luna I".

"I can't understand how we've not caught fire," said Jane during one of the intervals between inspection and watching, "when you think of the heat there must be outside there," she added, pointing towards the open shutter.

"The old 'Luna I' is certainly a tough ship" answered Martin, with a laugh.

He was proud of her, and, like all captains, loved his ship more as her danger grew. He touched her soft, blue-padded wall, and wished with all his heart that he could bring her to a safe harbour.

"There's always a chance left, Martin," Jane told him. "Think of the things that have happened to us since we left the earth: we thought we'd never get through any of them." She smiled at him encouragingly. "Something will happen," she added, crossing the cabin and curling up on the hammock beside him.

"You're the best first mate in the world, Jane," he answered. "I've got you in this mess, and I'll do anything to get you out. I agree there's always a chance."

He grinned cheerfully at her. After all, there still might be a chance, he thought.

"It's odd," Jane went on, "that we no longer see the moon at all. We can't have passed it, and even if we had we'd see it below us."

"Oh, we've not passed it," answered Martin; "we've simply gone in the opposite direction. The glare is so intense that it would dim the moon; that's why we can't see it. I wonder how far we've gone out of our course?" he added, knowing he would never have the answer.

"How far is the sun from the earth?" asked Jane. "Do you know?"

"Well, I don't think anyone knows, but it's supposed to be about ninety-three million miles," he told her.

"Ninety-three million miles?" echoed Jane. "But the 'Luna I' could never get that far."

"She might," answered Martin, crossing to the open shutter and putting on his sun-glasses. "Here, Jane," he called, "bring the telescope."

She sent Scruff flying and, treading on Tessie's tail, pushed the telescope into Martin's outstretched hands. He adjusted it carefully. At last he was in full sight of the sun. And what a sight for any observer!

A huge crimson world of fire seemed to fill the whole sky. Nothing was at rest–everywhere there was a state of boiling and violent eruption. Enormous mountains of flame shot up thousands of miles above the surface; forming fountains and cascades of orange, vermilion, and crimson fire; flaming rivers and seething masses changing into weird and fantastic shapes, boiling and spouting,

curling and creeping as the intense heat was driven upwards from the sun's interior. Sometimes the flames rolled back like waves from the sea-shore, leaving enormous black pits like volcanic craters, from which more flames shot out, forming in their turn cascades and feathers of fire.

Martin gazed fascinated by this terrible and wonderful spectacle. He forgot the re-directing of the course, forgot that they were marooned in a rocket thousands of miles from the earth and that they were heading straight towards this merciless world of fire and unrest. He held his breath in wonder–a sight which until now no human being had ever seen except through a telescope from the distance of ninety million miles away.

Jane reeled backwards after her first glance, the fiery glare almost blinding her. She sat, with her eyes covered, on the floor at Martin's feet.

Martin turned away from the window at last and took off his sun-glasses.

"Here, put these on and look at it through the telescope. It's the most wonderful thing I've ever seen in my life–nothing we've seen so far is as wonderful as that." He rubbed his eyes, careful to keep his back turned towards the window. "Isn't it a marvellous sight?" he asked, after a few seconds.

"Oh, Martin, it's terrible!" cried Jane. "Nothing but fire. If we landed on it we'd be burnt in a split second."

"In a split split second, you mean," returned Martin. "Here, give me the telescope again."

Jane was only too ready to give it back: she had no wish to look any longer on that disc of fire which came nearer and nearer with every breath she drew. It was some minutes before Martin spoke.

"You know, all the time there are showers, like shoot-

ing stars, flying away from the sun. Some seem to disappear at a terrific speed, and some fall back; or perhaps they are just hidden by the flames. I can't look any longer; my eyes ache. Do you want the telescope?" he asked.

Jane shook her head. The sun, like everything else she had seen on this strange voyage, was so different from what she had expected. It was impossible to believe that the warm, lovely sun she knew from the earth, which made one rather sleepy, and turned the sea into a diamond-studded lake in summer and made the snow glisten like sugar icing on a cake in winter, which ripened the world's fruit and corn and made buds turn into flowers and leaves, should in reality be that terrible mass of fire and turmoil. How sweet the earth seemed, with its soft colours and smells of the country! She turned her head away so that Martin should not see the tears that trickled slowly down her face. He wouldn't really understand, she thought; he didn't love the earth so much; he was so anxious to leave it.

But he understood more than she thought. His mind was working in very much the same way as Jane's as he turned from the window and the fierce, fiery glare of the sun and crossed the dimly lighted cabin.

Now that the first excitement was over at seeing the sun at closer quarters, he realised that that was the frightfulness into which they would be plunged. And apart from some chance happening–such a remote chance–nothing could save them from this dreadful fate.

But he was a firm believer in chance: after all, he thought, it was only chance that made my kite get caught in the telegraph wires that day. In spite of all the things that had happened, he did not regret it.

The sun's rays were reflected on everything in the

cabin, lighting it with a deep, golden glow like a sunset on an autumn evening, casting dark shadows in the dimly lighted corners. The only sound was the tinkle of the disk from Scruff's collar with his name and address engraved on it, as he scratched contentedly.

The travellers had their usual meal of food tablets, washed down with water from the tanks screwed to their lockers. Martin had refused to break into their supplies, for he had a firm conviction at the back of his mind that they would need them, not in the rocket, but on the moon. Jane had hidden a good supply of chocolate, and doled out one small square at a time. Martin was always under the impression that it was the last: Jane knew him too well to trust him with the whole lot at once.

Martin made another survey of the sun, and watched its writhings and turnings with the same amazement that he felt when he first saw it. Nothing had changed, except that things were clearer as they approached.

"You know, Jane," he said, climbing down from the locker, "I've a feeling that when we wake up we'll find that something different has happened."

"Why?" she asked. "Does the sun look different?"

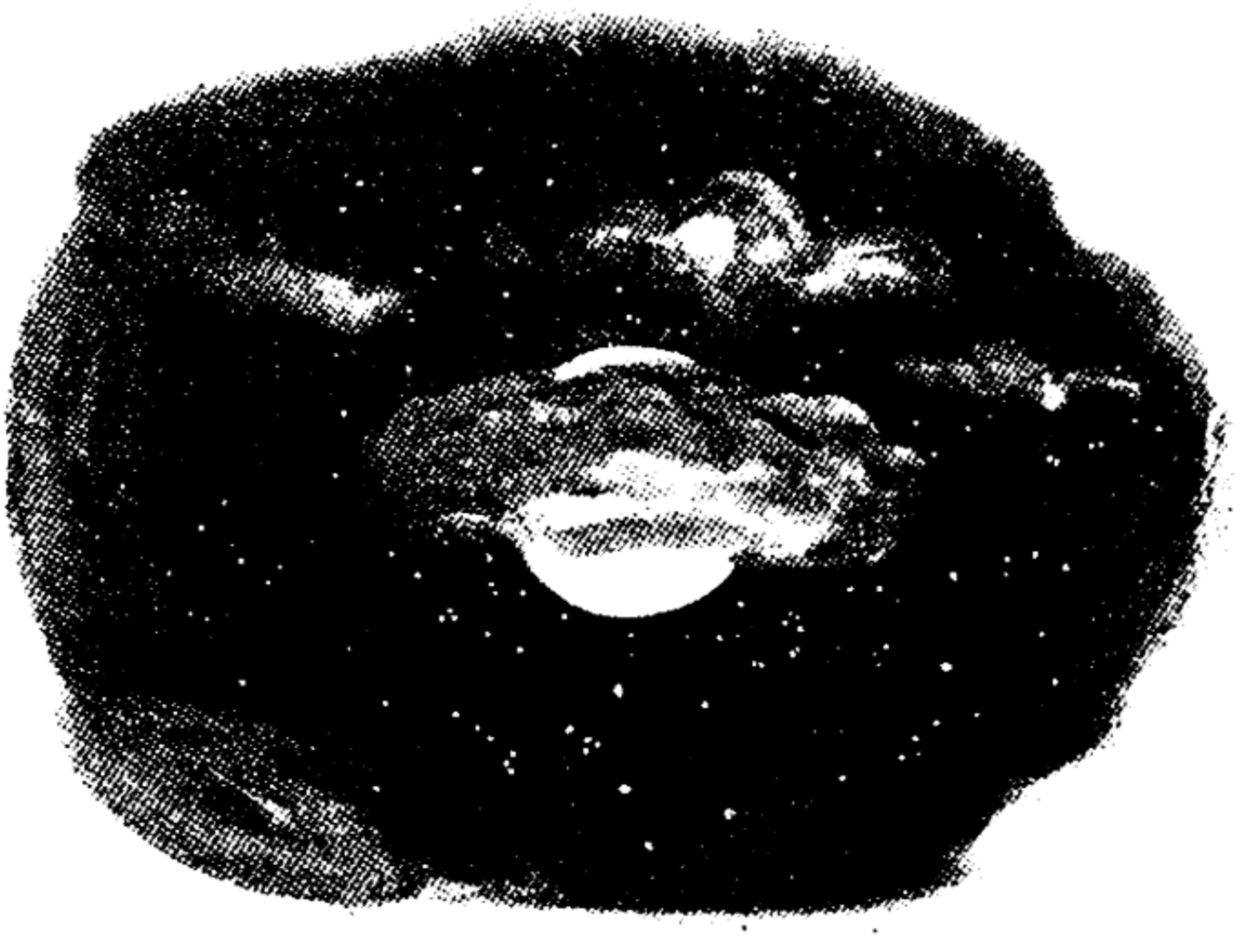
He shook his head, and carefully put his telescope out of harm's way.

"No," he told her; "we seem a bit nearer, if anything. It's just a kind of feeling, that's all. I'm awfully tired. Let's pull this shutter down and make the cabin dark, and perhaps we'll be able to go to sleep."

He fastened the shutter down, cutting out the merciless glare of the sun, and jumped to the ground, nearly blinded by the brilliant light; for he had forgotten to put on his sun-glasses. He stumbled across the gloomy floor, blundering into any object that lay in his path. He fell headlong on his face.

"What's happened?" cried Jane. "Martin! Are you all right?"

"Yes. I tripped over the radio set. I'd forgotten all about it," he answered. "Give me the torch: I must see if it's all right."



Chapter VI

SIR ARCHIBALD CRAWSHAY, the Astronomer Royal, opened his *Times* and settled himself comfortably in his armchair. His eyes scanned the headlines, then suddenly stopped.

"UNACCOUNTABLE WIRELESS MESSAGES PICKED UP BY AMATEUR."

"During the early hours of this morning Mr. George Dutton, an enthusiastic radio amateur, telephoned the offices of the *Times* saying he had picked up some extraordinary messages in morse code with the receiving set he had installed at his house in Wimbledon. When he informed us that these messages had been sent from or near the sun, we at once advised one of our correspondents to inquire further. Our correspondent arrived at Mr. Dutton's house within an hour, and

found him still working on his receiving set, but apparently after the first messages all communication had ceased. Mr. Dutton told our correspondent that it was his habit to work on his set every night from midnight until two or three in the morning after radio stations had closed down; and this morning he had picked up the astounding message, which was at first incoherent, but after some tuning in of his set became clearer. The message ran as follows: 'Changed . . . changed . . . course . . . changed. Sun . . . sun . . . heading for sun. Changed course . . . changed course . . . from moon.'

"This message was repeated at intervals for about half an hour. At times the wording altered slightly, but the content of the message was the same. As our correspondent was leaving he asked Mr. Dutton to try once more and see if he could pick up any further message. Within a few minutes of tuning in the set another message was picked up: our correspondent heard the message clearly. It ran: 'Course changed near sun. Course ch . . .' then silence. There can be only two explanations of these extraordinary messages. One, that they are a hoax; but Mr. Dutton is of the opinion that they are not, for technical reasons. The other explanation is that some experimenters have fired a rocket at the moon in secret to compete with Major Topham, who fired an experimental rocket a short time ago, preliminary to his flight in the 'Luna', which will take place as soon as Major Topham has news of the landing of the experimental one. These messages can have no bearing on the experimental rocket, as it only contained a cat and dog."

Sir Archibald groped excitedly on his telephone.

Senator Otis P. Hoover took a long drink of orange-juice and unfolded his copy of the *New York Globe*, propped it against his coffee-pot and ran his eyes over the newsheet. Then stopped.

"ENGLISHMAN LISTENS IN TO THE SUN."

"We hear on the greatest authority that an Englishman, Mr. George Dutton, claims to be receiving messages from the sun. We agree that Englishmen get into hot places sometimes and always get out of them, but we never thought one would get to the sun! Either someone is playing a little joke on Mr. Dutton, or someone else is trying to steal a march on Major Topham, who intends spending his holiday on the moon in a few days time. We eagerly wait for further messages."

"Suffering snakes!" said the Senator, "why can't folks stay put," and turned to the Wall Street news.

Mr. Chiang Lie See delicately flicked a speck of dust from his beautifully brushed black coat and carefully turned the pages of the 八世太太. Sipping his morning tea, he glanced at the headlines.

He folded his hands across his stomach and gazed peacefully at the rays of sun which filtered through the shuttered window.

Buck O'Ryan of Blue Mountain Creek squirted a stream of tobacco juice at a horse-fly and unwrapped a hunk of bread and cheese from a tattered piece of newspaper, spread the crumpled wrapping on his knees and spelt the words out with difficulty while he ate his breakfast.

". . . LISHMAN IN CONTACT WITH THE SUN."

". . . man living in an English suburb has been in contact with . . . ople on the sun. This is the first direct contact that has been . . . ade in history with any of the planets. The sun is about ninety-three million miles from the earth, or so we are told by experts, and is . . . composed entirely of fire. We are anxiously waiting further cables . . . formation on this subject."

"Aw, pity it's so tore," said Buck O'Ryan. "I like a bit of good readin'."

The private secretary to the Maharaja of Jedphore was sorting the morning newspapers for His Royal Highness when his eyes caught a headline on the front page of the *Bombay Times*.

" INTERPLANETARY CONTACT. "

By our London Correspondent.

"During the last few days further news has been anxiously awaited concerning some extraordinary messages reputed to have been picked up by an amateur wireless expert. The messages, coming from a region somewhere near the sun, were at first thought to be a hoax; but it is learnt on good authority that this is incorrect, and a statement is to be made shortly. In an interview with Mr. Dutton, who first received messages, it was learnt that he was working on a receiving set which he had made a short time ago, and he flatly denied any suspicion of a hoax: he is convinced that these messages are arriving from some agent in the vicinity of the sun."

The private secretary carefully marked this paragraph with his gold, ruby-studded pencil.

Kreuger Van Damm sat on the stoep of his house under the hot South African sun reading the *Cape Town Daily News*. There was only one paragraph that had any interest for him.

"ANOTHER CLAIM TO HAVE REACHED THE SUN BY WIRELESS."

"It has been learnt from England that messages are being sent by wireless from, or near, the sun. As all reports show that this is not a hoax, we can only conclude that somewhere in space there are human beings. Our correspondent in London has been in touch with the Greenwich Observatory, but the experts remain silent. All the world is anxiously awaiting further reports."

The grey-bearded South African leaned back and stared hard at the sun shining down on him like a huge brass gong.

"The sun is such a wonderful thing," he said; "anything might happen there."

Old Hector MacTavish settled himself on the bench outside the "Stag and Haggis" Inn, finished the rest of the whisky that a friend had bought him, and picked up the copy of the *Glasgow Herald* that a stranger had left behind. His failing eyesight could only read the headlines.

"RADIO PICKS UP MESSAGES FROM TRAVELLERS TO THE SUN."

"Och'awa!" he said in surprise, "An' mae'sel na' never even been in a 'bus."

Serge Peterhofsiki scratched himself and drew the thick but tattered rug closer round him against the biting Siberian wind that found its way through the ill-fitting windows of his shack as he read the latest copy of *Pravda*.

His small eyes caught a headline.

"ENGLISH UNDERGROUND RADIO IN TOUCH WITH THE SUN."

"It has been learnt from London that an Englishman working in secret has received messages from the farther planets. The action leading to his discovery was due to the fact that he had been in touch with the sun. His enemies reported this, and the authorities who immediately investigated his actions found this statement correct. Results arriving from the investigation are unknown."

Serge Peterhofsiki paused in his scratchings.

"Can this mean that the English are fleeing from the earth?" he said. "But the sun? How do we know it exists?" he added dreamily.

Don Pedro lay in a hammock under the trees, in his beautiful garden, gently fanned by the faint breeze from the Gulf of Mexico. Between sips from the long glass filled with golden liquid and tinkling ice he languidly glanced at the pile of newspapers that his servant had just brought him. There was very little to interest him until he saw one tiny paragraph.

"ENGLISHMAN REACHES THE SUN."

"From time to time there have been claims made that scientists from all parts of the world have been in contact with the sun; but a few days ago an Englishman living in one of the London suburbs received messages from travellers either on the sun or near that planet. There can be little doubt that these messages have come from a party of interplanetary explorers."

Don Pedro leapt to his feet and drew two tiny silver and pearl pistols from his sash.

"I salute the beautiful Sun Maidens," he cried, and gallantly fired into the air.

Mr. Huxtable, the owner of the only shop in the village of Little Chipping on the Marsh, spread a week-old copy of the *Evening Star* on the counter and began to weigh up his sugar. His eyes lighted on a paragraph at the top of the front page.

"WHAT IS BEHIND THE SECRECY OF THE MESSAGES FROM THE SUN?"

"So far there has been no further statement made concerning the mysterious messages that Mr. Dutton has claimed to have received from the sun. Greenwich Observatory remains silent on the matter, and so does the B.B.C. Although we have been in touch with Mr. Dutton, he refuses to answer any questions. Are there people living on the sun? Have representatives from England been sent to this planet? These are the questions the public demand to be answered as their right. We are the newspaper with the slogan 'We get things done', and we mean to probe this mystery to the very depths."

Mr. Huxtable could hardly believe his eyes.

"This is the first I've read about it," he said. "Now I suppose there will be another war and we'll have troops from the sun stationed here," he added brightly.

Soldiers mean trade.

And in a small, untidy office high up in Greenwich Observatory two men are talking.

"Yes," the Professor was saying, "I telephoned you as soon as I heard it. I knew, of course, it would be in the newspaper the next day, but I wanted you to prepare your wife for the shock."

Mr. Ridley shook his head.

"My wife doesn't know," he said.

"But how on earth did you keep the newspapers away from her?" the Professor asked.

"She never reads them–just looks at the pictures. No, the only chance is that someone will mention it to her; but we must take that chance. But seriously, Professor, do you think there is any hope of the rocket ever reaching the moon now?" Mr. Ridley asked anxiously.

The Professor shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say for certain either way, my friend?" he answered gently. "The chances are, I should say, equal," he added, knowing of course they were not, but it was difficult to tell Mr. Ridley so. "I have hopes," he went on. "After all, my colleagues were certain that the 'Luna I' had been destroyed by the meteor; but I never agreed with that theory of the disappearance: I always felt it was re-direction, and, you see . . ."

He spread out his hands.

The tired, worried man slumped in the arm-chair, nodded slowly.

"I've implicit faith in you, Professor. These things are

beyond me: it's hopeless for me to try to understand them. Have you had any more messages since you telephoned me? Any more news of any kind?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the Professor, "but no different from the first ones. We've answered him; but whether he has picked up our messages, of course we can't tell: we can only wait. You can rely on me to get in touch with you at once if there is the slightest change in the messages."

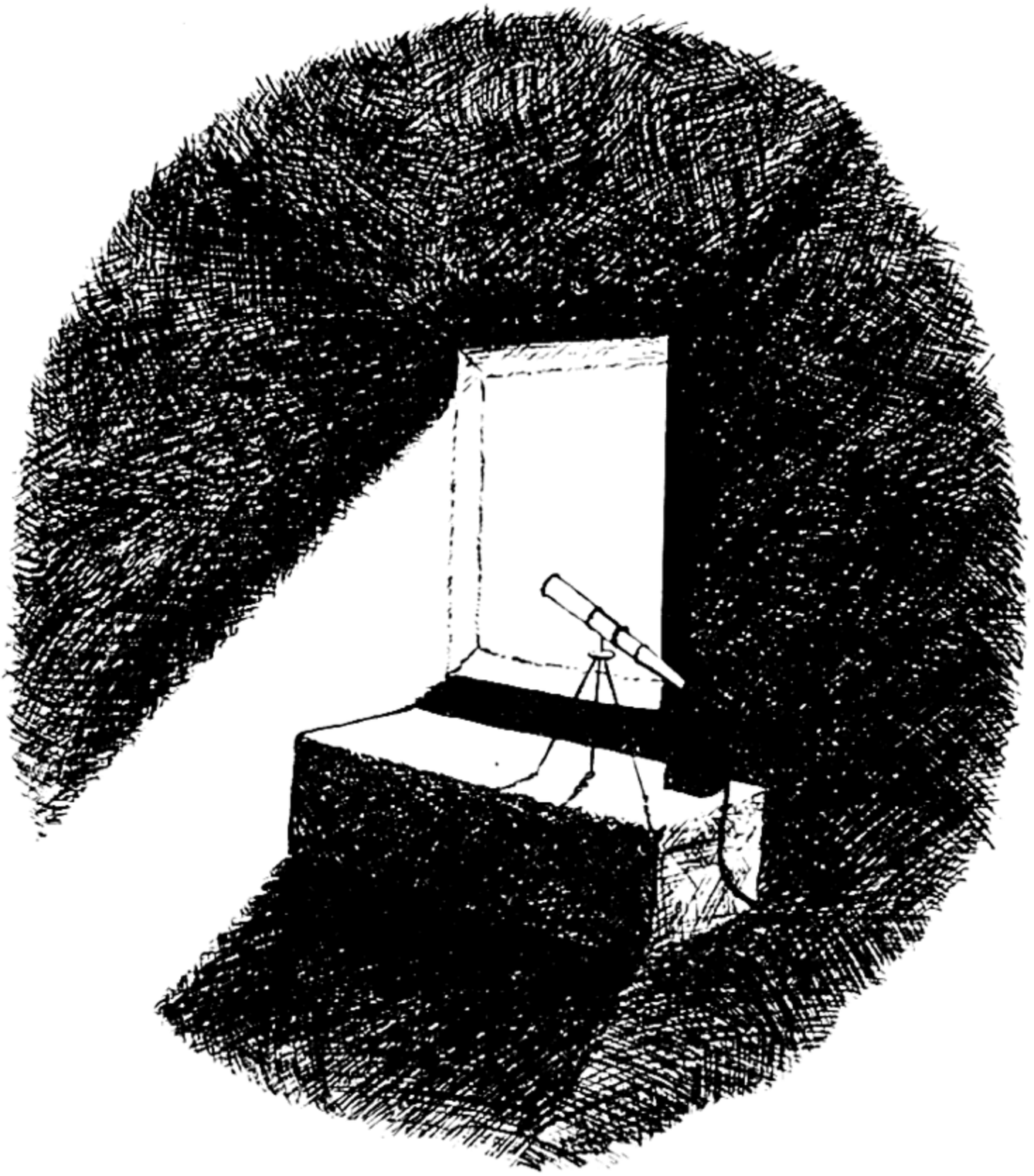
Mr. Ridley got slowly to his feet.

"Well, I'll not keep you, Professor: you have better and more useful things to do than spend your time talking to me," he said, with a weary smile.

"Don't go far away from the telephone during the next few hours," the Professor warned him as they walked towards the lift.

"No need to warn me about that," Mr. Ridley answered.

The lift carried him away, among people who were oblivious of all that was going on in his worried brain.



Chapter VII

MARTIN sat back on his heels and scratched his head: he was feeling giddy and heavy through bending over the radio transmitting set for several hours.

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "I've done everything I can think of; but whether I've made the thing work or not is another matter."

"It seemed to work," answered Jane, peering into the mass of wires and coils. "It made noises, anyway."

"Oh yes, it made noises: but were they the right kind of noises? I'll give it a rest, and try again later. I'd give

anything to know if anyone's heard me." He stretched his cramped limbs. "Thank goodness I learnt the morse alphabet, anyway!"

The fierce glow of the sun was still streaming through the half-open shutter, picking up points of light on the metal of the radio set like tiny red-hot cinders, while outside the fiery eruption writhed and cascaded. The only one who seemed to enjoy things thoroughly was Tessie, curled up fast asleep on the window-ledge, stretching lazily now and then, as if she was on an earthly window-ledge in the afternoon sun.

The hours passed monotonously. At intervals Martin would work on the radio set and make his usual inspection of the rocket. The chance remembrance of the radio set had made them forget their other misfortunes; and although Martin had resolved not to try to work the set until he arrived on the moon, he recklessly made his experiment; for in his heart he was doubtful now if they would ever reach the moon.

During one of his inspections of the engine-room he heard an exclamation from Jane. He put his head through the steel door leading to the cabin to see what fresh calamity had happened. Jane was standing in the middle of the floor with wide-open eyes.

"Martin, come here," she called. "Look!"

She pointed to Martin's coat, which was heaped up on the floor.

"It's only my coat," he answered, and turned back to the engine-room.

"No, come back," Jane told him, and grabbed his arm. "The last time I saw that coat it was over in the corner: it's moved!"

"Don't be absurd," said Martin. "If it has, I expect Scruff's dragged it there."

"No, Martin, he hasn't. The other things have moved, too–the food cylinder you threw away the other night, the car rug, too. Don't you see?"

She turned her puzzled face towards him.

He was by the window in one leap, pulled on his sunglasses and clicked the shutter up. Far away in the distance there was a faint blue shadow: the raging furnace of the sun, instead of being straight in front of them, was to the left; the fountains of fire were no longer clear to the naked eye, but a blurred, moving mass. His throat went dry and his heart started beating madly. He stood stiffly for a few moments, then gave a cry and sprang down from the locker.

"Jane! Jane!" he cried. His voice was hoarse. "Jane! we've changed course!"

He threw his arms round her, making her topple sideways.

"Do you mean we've turned round? When? How do you know?"

Her questions came in a jumble. Half laughing, half crying, she pulled him to the window. They both stared out at the blue sky which was widening in area, leaving the crimson horror more and more to the left.

"You see that blue? We're turning back towards the moon. Those things on the floor are slipping back, being drawn by the moon's gravity. We are safe. We'll reach the moon! It was worth it, wasn't it?" he asked her.

Jane nodded her head slowly.

"Martin," she said seriously, "I think we ought to say our prayers."

He turned to her and said in a surprised voice:

"Do you know, I've forgotten to say them all the time we've been away? I suppose it's not going to bed."

They were both silent for a few minutes.

"Now," said Martin briskly, "to work. First, I'll have a look through the telescope; then I'll send off another message. Perhaps the messages do reach the earth, after all. I think our luck's changed."

He was busy with his telescope at the opposite windows.

"We'll not see much of the moon yet," he went on, turning the screws and adjusting the lens carefully, "but we do know we're on our way, because the sky is darkening all the time."

And indeed it was. Far away in the distance there was deep, inky darkness, with the last glow of the sun shading into it. The effect was nearer to the sky seen from the earth than at any other time during the whole journey. It resembled a fading sunset with the night coming quickly up behind it. No star had as yet appeared, as the sun's rays were still too strong; but the lunar globe was returning to the cold, white appearance which was familiar to the travellers.

Martin laid aside his telescope and returned to his seat on the floor beside his radio set. He sat crossed-legged, like a Turk, crunching a piece of chocolate while he tapped out his message, which was to be received thousands of miles away. Little did he dream of the stir it would make in the scientific world, in fact, after the first messages almost the whole world had become scientific. The newspapers were full of articles on the sun, the moon, and the stars, and the most exaggerated accounts were given of the mysterious messages. Some went so far as to declare that the messages had come straight from the heart of the sun, and that on that planet were human beings of high intellect and scientific minds. All the while the Greenwich Observatory kept silent; but by degrees the truth had leaked out that a boy and girl had

stowed away in the "Luna I" and that the messages were coming from these two voyagers in space, who were lost and without help.

Martin worked on his radio until the cabin was dim and shadowy and his back ached from bending low over the set. At last he sat back on his heels.

"I've only sent one message," he said.

"What did you say this time?" asked Jane.

" 'Course changed to moon,' " he told her. " I didn't know what else to say. I'd love to know if anyone picked it up. Now I'll see what it looks like outside."

The two watchers posted themselves at the windows. By now all the shutters were up and the familiar steel-blue light was flooding the cabin. The shoulder of the moon could be seen like a huge incandescent globe shining down on them, but they no longer regarded it as a cold, merciless light. Jane, who had called it cold and harsh, now said it was lovely, soft and silvery. It was a curious sensation gazing on the great, shining planet: it was the same feeling that sailors and explorers have when they have been away from their home for many years and they first sight their native shores.

The appearance of the moon had changed considerably since they had last seen it. The mountain ranges now stood out clearly and sharply, throwing deep shadows; the greenish-copper patches which had puzzled Martin so much were still indistinguishable, but they had a curious glitter now, as they caught the reflection from the far-distant sun. It excited him to feel that in a few hours' time–he crossed his fingers–he would know what these phantom shapes were.

Everyone's spirits had risen since the rocket changed course, except poor Tessie's, who regretted her sunshine. She prowled about the cabin and mewed dolefully.

Scruff was in high spirits, leaping around and barking. He sensed the relief that the travellers felt. But cats are very different animals from dogs: cats' first and last thoughts are for their own comfort, and they are quite insensitive to the feelings of anyone round them. Scruff, in his joy, began to play with Tessie, but the only response he had was to be spat at, and he retired with a yelp and a scratch on his nose.

"What about something real to eat, Jane?" Martin asked as they turned away from their moon-gazing. "Just to celebrate. Something that's real food, and not just a tablet. We've plenty, really."

Jane hesitated for a minute; she wanted to make her stores last as long as possible, but felt, as Martin did, that this was no ordinary occasion.

"All right," she smiled, "we'll have a party. You'll have to help me lift the bags, though; they're heavy."

Together they hauled the school bags and the rucksack out of the lockers and prepared their feast. Scruff gave a hasty lick to the top of the large cake which Jane had laid on top of a locker chest, and Martin had to hang on to his collar. Poor Scruff, he felt in need of solid food as well. It was a very cheerful and rather noisy party: cake, sardines (Tessie had the tin to lick out), ginger beer, and apples. There was no bone for Scruff, but he did very well with a slice of cake and a sardine. Martin and Scruff would have been quite happy eating all their stores without any thought for the future; so Jane calmly put the rest of the cake back in the tin and tumbled the apples into her school bag and announced that the party was over, and they both settled themselves in their hammocks to talk and drowse as they felt inclined. This was the first time for so long that they had felt carefree. Martin had forgotten that he had no means of telling when they were

near enough to the moon for him to open the parachute wings, but as he lay half asleep in his hammock after making up his log it suddenly came back to him, and he sat bolt upright.

"*Now* what's the matter?" asked Jane irritably.

Although she was feeling relieved and in high spirits, she was still prepared for calamity. And now that danger had passed some of her old truculence had returned.

"Oh, nothing," answered Martin carelessly–"only I've just remembered that we've no way of telling when we are near enough to the moon to land, and unless those wings are opened we're going to add one more crater to it! I'll have to keep a good watch, that's all, and open them when I think it's the right distance away."

"Yes," Jane nodded, "that's all you can do. We'll take it in turns watching. It's not fair that you should do it all the time."

"No," Martin answered, "I'll watch. Anyway, it won't be for some time, I should think. I'll go to sleep now, and then start my watch when I wake up, and I won't move from the window until we land."

With this resolve he turned over on his side. Within a few minutes they were both in the deep sleep that comes after hours of anxiety.

Martin woke with a warm, damp feeling about his face and neck. He put out his hand vaguely, and it came in contact with something rough and stubby. It was Scruff's neck: he was licking his master's face and blowing in his ear. In some odd canine way he knew Martin had slept long enough and that it was time to begin the last long watch.

Martin slid off his hammock and yawned, Scruff capering round him and wagging his stumpy tail in approval.

"Good boy, Scruffy," Martin whispered, ruffling the dog's wiry coat. "You're a good bo'sun to pipe me on

watch. With Jane as first mate and you as bo'sun no captain should fail to bring his ship into harbour," he added, making his way to his look-out post and his telescope.

The moon was now so close that it almost filled the sky: there was only a tiny glimpse of indigo space to be seen through the windows. Martin made an inspection of the engine-room and cabin apparatus. Everything seemed in order. Then he made a trip to the spearhead of the rocket: it occurred to him that the flash pellets might have moved during their change of course. It was important that these should be in working order, otherwise their signal of landing would not be seen from the earth.

His surmise was correct: the pellets had shifted a considerable amount, and there was only one thing to do–shift them all back again. He called to Jane, who jumped to her feet at once and put her head round the door of the spearhead compartment.

"What's the matter?" she asked sleepily.

"Nothing much," Martin told her; "but the pellets have moved, and we'll have to move them back in position. I want you to do it, because I must get back to the telescope. Look"–he pointed to a small well deep in the rocket's nose–"pack them in there as tightly as you can, and close the wire door on them. I suppose someone forgot to shut it before we left, and when the rocket swung round they all shifted. It's quite easy, but it will take a bit of time."

Jane scrambled through the slit of a door and was soon busy scooping the little grey pellets up in her hands and rolling them into the well.

Meanwhile Martin, after a long drink of water to wash down his food tablets, settled himself at his post.

The new world in front of him was no longer shining

with the brilliant light to which he had become accustomed; it was dimmer and of a grey colour. In place of blinding light there was only a soft shimmer on the mountain peaks, and the huge craters were now plainly visible, making shadows of a million shapes and sizes, ringed with what appeared to be smaller mountains or hills of the curious green bronzes. These, by some trick of light, seemed to move slightly. It was still a complete mystery what these strange shapes could be.

There was no way of telling how long his vigil lasted, but he only left his post to make his inspection of the engine-room. He felt it would be the last, for he knew that very soon they would be near enough to the end of their journey for him to release the parachute wings.

He returned to his post and watched, with Jane and Scruff sitting at his side. Suddenly he said calmly:

"Jane, we're almost there, I think."

He had too much on his mind to feel any excitement: his one thought was to open the wings and slacken speed.

"Now listen," he said to his sister. "You stand on this locker and look as far down the wings as you can: you remember how you did at the aerodrome? Well, as soon as you see the parachute wings slide out from under the others, tell me. I'm going to pull down the lever."

With his heart beating like a kettle-drum against his ribs, he touched the little lever handle.

"Now," he called to Jane, and slowly pulled the handle down towards the red mark on the indicator.

There was a few seconds' silence, then a shout of joy from Jane.

"They've worked! Martin, they've worked!"

She jumped down and ran towards him.

"Get back and look!" he snapped at her, leaping to the windows opposite.

There was the grey, glistening parachute wing stretching far out under the main wing. Both were in perfect working order. He felt his last worry lifted. There was nothing to do now but wait for the landing. How long the wait would be he had no idea.

"I think we'd better put Scruff and Tessie back in their locker," he told Jane, "and strap ourselves in our hammocks, because even if the parachute wings work there's sure to be an awful bump, and we don't want to arrive on the moon with broken heads; and our angle will change."

He packed up his telescope and carried it with him to the hammock.

And so the two explorers waited for their journey's end. It seemed hours to them, sitting strapped to their hammocks watching the luminous world outside their window. The unpleasant feeling of greater weight began to increase as they were drawn rapidly towards the moon. Although not so great as when they were leaving the earth, there was still the helpless heaviness and sickening giddiness; but by now they were experienced travellers through the void, and kept safely strapped until they reached their harbour.

They were now flying directly across the moon face. Nothing could be seen outside except soft, shimmering silver-greys as they swooped silently down and the "Luna I" turned steeply on her spearhead, everything in the cabin that was unattached sliding with her. Down, down they swooped, the landscape outside rushing by as they slackened speed. Jane shut her eyes and waited for the crash. Martin craned his neck as far as he could to see out of his window. They appeared to be only a few huudred feet from the ground, but they still went on. Now and then something seemed to scrape the rocket with a crash-

ing, tearing vibration, but without sound. Round and round the "Luna I" circled: Martin remembered having his tonsils removed–chloroform–sleepiness–growing darkness. . . .

Then suddenly, without warning, there was a blinding, soundless explosion that shook the rocket and lighted the whole outside world with a crimson flame. Martin struggled to the window.

Chapter VIII

THE telephone rang shrilly through the darkened hall of Mill House. At the first ring a tall man came racing down the staircase, oblivious of lost slippers and stubbed toes. He had barely snatched the telephone receiver from the brackets when an excited voice greeted him from the other end of the line.

"Ridley? Is that you, Ridley?" the voice of the Professor stammered.

"Yes, yes," Mr. Ridley answered. "What is it?"

He hardly dared ask the question.

"News, my friend," said the delighted Professor. "The very best of news. The red flash was seen a few minutes ago. I saw it myself: the best sight I've ever seen in my life. They are safe–or rather they are on the moon; and that, compared with all the other things that must have happened to them, means safety."

Mr. Ridley felt his head swim and his knees almost give way: he sat weakly on the edge of the hall table.

"Professor," he said gently, "do you mind saying that all over again?" For what with the Professor's rapid excited voice and Mr. Ridley's swimming head he could hardly understand a word.

After the Professor had repeated it all slowly, Mr. Ridley was able to answer him.

"Is there any message from them yet?" he asked.

"No," was the answer. "We are standing by for one. But what does that matter? The main thing is that the 'Luna I' has landed, and apparently undamaged, for the spearhead is the first thing that would have been damaged, and we know it's not, by the pellets firing."

"I'll be with you as soon as it's daylight," Mr. Ridley answered. "There may be some more news then. There are a lot of things I want to discuss with you, Professor. My head is not very clear now. Good-bye for a few hours."

"For a few hours, my friend," answered the Professor. "I have an idea what the 'lot of things' are."

He laughed as he hung up the receiver, leaving Mr. Ridley to return upstairs as rapidly as he had dashed down. The shadowy figure of his wife was standing at the head of the stairs, with her hands tightly clasped, scarcely breathing, waiting to hear his news.

They sat sipping scalding tea and watched the dawn creep up from the east, lighting the night sky with

purple and yellow, and with the first rosy streak Mr. Ridley put down the tea-cup.

"I've promised to see the Professor as early as possible this morning," he told his wife. "There is the question of the rescue party to consider." He looked straight at her. "And of course who is to make up the party," he added carelessly.

"Yes, of course, dear," his wife agreed. "The rescue party must go at once–to-day, in fact."

"A party like that, my dear, can't be organised in a few hours; but it will have to be very soon, on account of the position of the moon, I suppose. Anyway, I'll know more about it when I've seen the Professor. He will no doubt lead the party, and who else will be going I don't know. Well, I'll have my bath now. You know, I feel dazed."

He ran his fingers through his short, corn-stalk hair.

"Yes," his wife nodded. "I do also. Of course," she added, "Martin is a very naughty boy."

Her husband looked at her for a moment, and then laughed. The idea of calling anyone who had planned a voyage like that and taken the risks that Martin had taken a "naughty boy" amused him intensely. No, he could never again regard Martin as that, no matter what they did.

When Mr. Ridley arrived at Greenwich, he found, in spite of the early hour, little groups of learned-looking men standing about talking: some cheerfully, some seriously, and some gloomily. The cheerful and serious ones were those interested in the flight of the "Luna I", and the Professor's friends; the gloomy men were those who were intensely interested, but also jealous of the success of the flight. Several heads were turned in the direction of the tall, fair man who hurried past them and disappeared into the waiting lift: he was by now a

familiar sight at Greenwich, and everyone knew that he was the father of the two stowaways in the famous rocket.

Mr. Ridley was greeted with vigorous handshakes from the cheerful, untidy Professor, who, with shirt collar unbuttoned and ruffled hair, was drinking coffee in great gulps.

"She docked at three-thirty this morning!" he shouted gleefully, waving his cup and sending coffee splashing over Henry's elegant grey suit. "We've had our first message. It ran, 'On moon, on moon'; that's all. But that's all we wanted to hear. Oh, the sight of that red flash was the finest sight I've ever seen in my life! Last night I was an old man. This morning I'm as young as Martin," the Professor rattled on between gulps of hot coffee, then added seriously, "Well, what do you, as a fellow explorer, think of your son now? For he will be hailed as the most daring explorer of his time: to undertake an expedition of that kind with no equipment except, I suppose, his home-made telescope. You have a son to be proud of, Mr. Ridley. But I need not tell you that: your face shows it too plainly."

Mr. Ridley nodded smilingly. He was indeed proud of his son, and was impatient to see him, to be the one who sat and listened to stories of adventure instead of telling them.

"When will the rescue party start?" he asked as soon as he could break in through the Professor's excited chatter.

"When the equipment is stored in the 'Luna' and she is fuelled: that should be completed by to-morrow night. Don't ask me when we will arrive, or what route we will take! We have seen what can happen to rockets! But rest assured we will start at the first possible moment and return with those two vagabonds."

The Professor was looking intently at Mr. Ridley, waiting for the request that he felt sure would come.

Mr. Ridley carefully laid his hat on the desk and walked to the window.

"How many people will be going with you, Professor?" he asked quietly.

"Oh–er–let me see." The Professor screwed up his eyes and pretended to think. He knew perfectly well how many, but it amused him to play with the anxious man opposite him. "Er–well, of course Major Topham will lead the party: he is so enthralled with his role of rescuer that he's quite got over his disappointment at not being the first man on the moon! I will go, our good Sergeant Hodson, Dr. Hobbes, and Brian Cooke. That's all."

He stared hard at his shoes.

"Is there room for another passenger? A completely useless one whose only qualifications are that he is accustomed to travel and discomfort," Mr. Ridley asked, coming towards the Professor.

"Plenty of room. I expected this," answered the Professor. "But the passenger will be far from useless. But your wife? What will she say to her husband as well as her son becoming a man on the moon?"

"Well, she is so overjoyed to hear the rocket has reached the moon, after all, that the thought of danger doesn't enter into it any longer: she referred to Martin merely as a 'naughty boy'!" They both laughed heartily. "In fact, she would be almost willing to come herself, I think," he added.

"Good heavens, no!" The Professor threw up his hands. "One woman explorer in the family is enough! Now, as far as I can tell, we will take off to-morrow night. There's no need to bother about any equipment: we can supply you with everything, we have ample stores: we were prepared to add one more to our number of passengers at the last moment if necessary. I'll keep in touch

with you, of course, during the day, and I'll telephone the final arrangements to-night." A discreet knock at the door made the Professor turn his head. "Come in," he called.

It was Jackson, the night porter.

"'Ave you finished?" he asked, noisily clearing away the cups and saucers.

The Professor nodded and then clasped his forehead.

"I've just remembered there's a meeting early this morning. Great heavens! and I've not even washed my face." He shook hands hurriedly with Mr. Ridley. "I'll phone you: I must dash away now. Good-bye. . . ."

His voice trailed off as the door closed behind him.

Mr. Ridley stood talking to Henry for a few minutes and then started for home. He was feeling a little awed by the proposal he had just made to the Professor; and shivered slightly as he glanced up at the sky which was to be his path in a few hours' time.

Chapter IX

It was the blinding flash from the explosion of the pellets as the rocket's spearhead struck the surface of the moon that made the travellers realise they were at their journey's end; for the "Luna I" glided to her resting-place as smoothly as a swallow to her nest. In a few seconds they had ripped the straps apart and were scrambling from their hammocks.

Jane dashed to the main door of the cabin, and was just wrenching it open when Martin caught hold of her arm, dragging her backwards.

"There's a lot to do before we can go out of the cabin," he told her. "First we must find oxygen masks; then we'll have to go into the air-lock for a few minutes."

"Why?" asked Jane, taking the masks from their bracket on the wall.

"Well, because we'd probably die straight away if we went out too soon. It's much the same as divers coming to the surface of the water. They do it by degrees. The Pro-

fessor told me that they would go in the air-lock and let out the air from the cabin and get acclimatised before going outside. Seems sensible; so in you go!"

He pushed Jane, Scruff and Tessie into the air-lock and followed, closing the door behind him, while the air from the cabin escaped through the open supply hatch.

After a few minutes Martin came cautiously through the door leading to the cabin. He felt a curious sensation. After being accustomed to the heavy air from the earth, the weightlessness from the moon's airlessness threw all the pressure-resisting mechanisms of his body out of gear. He pitched forward, but saved himself by catching hold of the corner of a locker lid. He paused for a minute, then let go his hold. Apart from feeling rather like a rubber ball ready to bounce at any moment, he was more or less normal.

"Come out now," he called to Jane; "but be careful: it's going to take us a little while to get our 'moon legs'!"

Jane came forward slowly, with outstretched arms like a sleep-walker: she meant to take no chances on her first entrance into this new world of theirs. And so the first People on the Moon made their way across the cabin.

"Now," said Martin, "we'll dig out all the clothes we brought with us: the cold is going to be awful. Where are they?"

"Here," Jane told him, pointing to the rolled-up car rug in the bottom of the locker.

Jane was certainly a good store-keeper. As she unrolled her rug, out tumbled warm clothes of every description. She had rifled a trunk containing most of her father's Arctic kit, including long, thick, ice-wool stockings (the size and length made Martin shout with laughter; but how glad he was later on of Jane's wisdom and forethought); thick jerseys and knitted helmets;

two leather "duffle coats" lined with sheepskin (which reached far below their knees), and driving-gloves. All those treasures were spread out on the floor. With everything Martin picked up he told her what a fine storekeeper she was and the greatest ally anyone could want on an expedition. They muffled themselves in their warm clothes and prepared for their journey into the new world.

The first sight of the lunar landscape filled the boy and girl with wonder. The grandeur and beauty of this grey, cold, silent land surpassed anything they had ever dreamt of. Immense mountain ranges threw shadows into caverns fathoms deep; the earth-light made plains hundreds of miles wide appear rivers of shimmering silver. Lava thrown from the extinct volcanoes fell into weird shapes, like pre-historic animals fossilised in the icy cold. Light caught the mountain tops like moonlight on Gothic cathedral spires, cutting their lace-like formations against an indigo sky and millions of stars. No movement or sound disturbed the peace of this unearthly land. The strength of the earth-light was truly amazing compared to the moonlight which lights the earth. Here there was no softening half-tones or dusky shadows–everything was clearly cut into shapes and angles. It was a world of sharp contrast, black and white, heat and cold; and all substance appeared to be of the same grey, dry pumice stone in various degrees of texture.

The explorers stood gazing at this spectacle in bewilderment, their feet sinking into the soft, ashy dust, and forgetting the ice-cold condition of their newly discovered world or the trials awaiting them. They were reluctant to break the silence. There was something very terrifying about the vastness of space. Everything was much higher than on earth: the highest earthly mountain

would have looked like a medium-sized hill compared with these enormous ranges that loomed against the sky. To the right lay a wide plain: as far as the eye could see was flat, silver grey, like a tranquil sea in moonlight. To the left were hills and crevasses leading to the mountain slopes and cliffs. This seemed to be the best part to begin their exploration.

Martin fished in his pocket and produced a piece of crumpled rag and a short stick.

"What's that?" Jane asked.

Martin fitted the piece of rag to the stick with drawing-pins and knelt down on the ground without answering. A tiny Union Jack hung limply from its stick-mast.

"Oh, Martin! How clever of you to remember that!" Jane cried. "Now the moon's a British possession!"

"Salute the flag, Jane," said the First Man on the Moon proudly.

They both stood to attention and solemnly saluted the first Union Jack to be planted on another planet.

Scruff began sniffing suspiciously round the base of the mast.

"Hey, Scruff," shouted Martin, grabbing the dog's collar; "that's no way to treat the British flag!"

"Oh, Scruff," said Jane reproachfully, "you come all the way to the moon, and that's the way you behave." She darted back to the rocket, and reappeared in a few minutes carrying a screw of paper and calling, "Tess! Tess! where are you?"

The cat stalked with erect tail towards her and mewed mournfully. Jane smeared its front paws and its nose with butter.

"There!" she said, depositing Tessie on the ground. "Perhaps that will make you feel at home!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Martin. "You remember

to bring butter for Tessie's paws, but it never occurred to you to bring a Union Jack."

Poor Jane looked crestfallen.

"We ought to name this place right away, Martin," she said, anxious to change the subject.

"Yes," answered Martin. "It's a port, of course. I know. Port Ridley. After all, Father discovered a Port Ridley on the earth, and we've discovered one on the moon. I wish I'd thought of the air-guns, then we'd have had a gun salute."

As it was, they had to be content with cheering, but their cheering, accompanied by Scruff's excited yelps, sounded like whispers in this land of silence, where no tree existed and no bird sang, no kindly river or stream gurgled its way through crevasses and valleys, and not even the slightest breeze broke the weird stillness. The cheers stopped abruptly as there was no echo, and the travellers shivered in the icy air.

"I think we'd better start exploring to the left," Martin said; "it looks more exciting than that empty plain."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until daylight?" enquired Jane.

"Till daylight!" echoed Martin. "The night lasts two weeks on the moon! As we've lost count of time, we have no idea how long we took to get here. I don't know how long it will stay dark; but if they've seen our flash from the earth, it won't be very long before 'Luna' will arrive. No, we must start at once," he added firmly, leading the procession, consisting of a rather meek girl and a wire-haired terrier, back to the rocket: the cat, with the self-absorbed air of all cats, sat licking her paws.

It was only a matter of a few minutes before the exploring party set out. Jane had tied a bright yellow scarf over her head, and Martin called her the first peasant of

the moon. It was a cheerful, eager party that faced the unknown perils of this lunar land.

Their feet sank into the grey, powdery dust as they climbed slowly over the uneven ground. Jane jumped across a fairly deep crack in the surface, and found herself carried several feet into the air. She sat down suddenly.

"Did you see how high I jumped, Martin?" she called.

"Yes," he answered, "I did. You seemed to float. Wait a minute. I'll jump over and see what happens."

He sprang across the ditch and high into the air–not as high as Jane, but much higher than he would normally have done–while Scruff, who followed, seemed to fly almost shoulder level in one bound.

Martin gave a little jump which would normally have taken him about one foot from the ground. This time he sprang several feet into the air. He stood scratching his head, his eyebrows contracted in a puzzled frown.

The force of gravity on the moon being only a sixth as great as on the earth, they could jump six times as high as they were accustomed to, and they were to discover later that they could climb six times as high without getting tired; but at this stage of their adventure it was still part of the great mystery.

Jane stopped suddenly.

"Look at Scruff!" she cried.

And there was poor Scruff lying panting on his side, his tongue rapidly turning blue, and his large brown eyes turned imploringly towards them for help. They both knelt down beside him, and Jane lifted his head gently into her lap.

"He can't breathe, Martin," she said in despair. "He'll die. Poor, poor old Scruffy!"

She bent over the hot little black nose.

"Whatever can be the matter with him?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Martin, jumping to his feet. "What idiots we were! There's no air for him. We've got masks on. We must run back quickly with him to the 'Luna I' and give him some oxygen."

He gathered the poor, panting little dog into his arms and began to run in long, leaping strides back to the rocket, followed by Jane. It was only a matter of a few minutes before they were inside the cabin and an oxygen tube fixed to Scruff's nose. Gradually his breath came more easily and his tongue was again its rosy pink. He wagged his stumpy tail and gazed his gratitude at his two friends. After a long drink of water and a good shake he was once again the old Scruff, ready for whatever adventure might come his way.

"Now, unless we can fix one of the spare oxygen masks to his collar, poor old Scruffy must be shut up here all the time," Martin told Jane despondently. "We can't take him out for more than a few minutes."

Jane took down three oxygen masks from their hooks on the wall and examined each in turn. They were all different sizes. She chose the smallest, and called Scruff to her. The mask fitted right over his head, making him look like some strange kind of miniature hog with a long snout and huge eyes. And there was never a dog in all the world who hated his mask more than Scruff. He wriggled and sneezed, coughed and growled, but it was all useless: Martin held him between his knees, while Jane, with the aid of her hair ribbon and Martin's school tie, fixed the mask firmly to the dog's collar and sat back exhausted by their struggles, laughing at the dejected-looking terrier sitting in the middle of the cabin with his head lowered to the ground.

"Tessie!" cried Jane in alarm. "We've forgotten her; perhaps she's dead already."

She jumped up and started towards the cabin door; but there was Tessie curled up in one of the hammocks fast asleep. It was cold outside, and a cat's sense of adventure is small compared with its sense of comfort.

"Well, off we go again," said Martin cheerfully, slinging his school bag, packed with food, note-books, and envelopes in which to put specimens and various oddments, over his shoulder, as he led the way through the cabin door and out into the silvery twilight.

Their eyes gradually became accustomed to the curious half-light, and they found in a short space of time that they were able to see their surroundings as clearly as if in daylight, the high lights from the mountains reflecting on the pale, grey, ashy surface and throwing long fingers of shadow. The colour seemed to be more of a bluish tint as their eyes became focused to their surroundings, and not so startlingly black and white as when they first saw the lunar world.

It was while walking under one of the giant cliffs that they made their first discovery.

Jane sat down to take off her shoes, which were full of clinkers, when she noticed a movement in the powdery ground by her side. In a few seconds swarms of objects that at first appeared to be tiny bits of stick wriggled their way out of the ground. Jane's shoes lay forgotten while they examined these strange moving things. They were about one inch to four inches long, and of no particular shape. Some had as many as six or seven tiny twisted "legs" that moved stiffly; others only one that they used as a kind of ear with which to steer themselves along the ground: the mass of greyish-brown, twig-like creatures slowly worked their way through the ash to the surface.

Martin took some of them in his hand and examined

them. They seemed to have no eyes, noses or mouths, and one felt they would be brittle to the touch and break off in pieces like dry sticks. In fact, that probably accounted for the legless state of so many of these strange creatures.

Martin stirred the ground carefully with his fingers, and found it fell in like a shell. Out swarmed hundreds of these moon ants (for that was the name the explorers gave to them), crawling slowly along and making tiny roadways in the ash. Some had begun to crawl back again to their cold, dry nests; but, unlike earth ants, there was no organisation, no scurrying here and there storing food and building dams, no caring for their wounded and dead: these moon ants simply crawled blindly to and fro with no object or aim in their dry, stick-like lives. Martin put a handful of ash and a few ants into an envelope. These were his first specimens.

Jane tied her shoe-laces and scrambled up from the ant-hills. They both felt very pleased at their first discovery, and were eager to push on their way, so they began their long climb up the cliff which led to a high mountain where they would be able to view the surrounding country through the telescope.

The way up the cliff was long and difficult climbing, for the surface was mainly composed of the same powdery ash as they had found everywhere, and only a rock here and there to cling to; but on they went, with Scruff bounding ahead and barking encouragement. At last they reached the summit and sat down to rest, overlooking the valley beneath them.

The huge banks leading to the valley gave a curious effect of wooded slopes; the lava ash had formed delicate, lace-like patterns, piled in groups like young saplings, some many feet high with overhanging branches. It was like looking down on a transformation scene in a panto-

mime–so unreal that you expected it to change any moment into another fairy-like scene of glittering silver; and in the distance loomed the powerful mountain ranges, dark and sinister, their peaks touched with silver against the indigo, starry sky.

"What shall we name that valley?" inquired Jane, breaking their long silence.

"Yes," answered Martin, "we'll have to name it, of course. Now, let's think. 'Martin Valley'; that's no good. 'Jane Valley'; that's worse. Now it's your turn."

Jane looked dreamily down on the winding silver scene. Somehow no name common to earth seemed suitable.

"I know," she said. " 'The Luna Valley', of course."

"No," corrected Martin, " 'The Great Luna Valley'."

"Oh 'Great' is an ugly word, except when you use it for mountains. After all, the valley isn't great; it's beautiful," said Jane firmly.

And "The Luna Valley" it was.

"It's odd that we haven't seen anything to account for those green bronze paths we saw on the journey," Martin said, fixing his telescope to its tripod. "They were very clear, and so far there's not one sign of them."

He twisted the screws and peered through the eye-lens.

"There's not much to see," he went on–"no more, really, than without the telescope. I think we'd better be on our way."

He packed up, whistling soundlessly to Scruff, who was busy digging a hole and sending showers of lunar soil flying in all directions.

"It's your turn to take the school bag," he told Jane.

"I suppose we'll be able to find our way back to the 'Luna'," Jane remarked, shouldering the bag of supplies.

"Yes," answered Martin, "we'll just follow our tracks

back; the marks are very distinct and there's no wind to disturb them."

But wind was not the danger.

Jane led the way down the slope to the valley, jumping ditches and holding on to the craggy rocks to steady herself, for the way was steep and uneven. A vibration from behind her made her look over her shoulder.

Martin had disappeared.

Chapter X

JANE felt as though her heart, brain and legs had refused to move. After the slight ground shock there was complete silence, and, as far as she could see through the silvery twilight, nothing to account for the sudden disappearance of her brother.

"Martin," she called; but there was no answer.

She climbed on one of the hillocks of the sloping path and tried to shout loudly; but her voice was like a whisper.

"Martin!"

The only answer was the scurrying of Scruff's four feet scattering ash after him in a cloud. His quick canine ears could hear things that humans could not, and his sense of danger was always on the alert, and Jane's voice had an urgent note in it which told the gallant little terrier that help was needed. He jumped round her, peering inquiringly through the eye-holes of his mask.

"Go, find Martin," Jane told him. "Good Scruff! Find him. Good boy!"

Off Scruff scampered, with Jane following closely at his heels; but the oxygen mask had cut off all scent, so his keen terrier nose was useless to him except to blow through with indignation at being baffled in his dog's work. They searched the ground inch by inch, but could find no signs of their comrade: it was as if the ground had swallowed him, leaving no clue. Jane sat down in despair, and Scruff dashed up to her and nuzzled his head against her in sympathy, and then was off again, searching and peering into crevasses. Suddenly Scruff stopped in his search, his four white legs quivering and tail wagging furiously. He took a nearby boulder in one bound and landed head first in the middle of a small ditch. His muffled barking was answered by a small stone hurled apparently from the ground: the mask had killed his sense of smell, but it had not dimmed his sharp terrier ears. He stood peering over the ridge of a newly made crater.

Jane leapt the boulder, and was beside Scruff in a few seconds. Lying flat on her face, she looked over the edge of the crater into the inky darkness below.

"Jane!" a voice called a little above a whisper from the depths of the crater. "Jane!"

"Here, Martin," Jane cried down to him unsteadily. "Are you very far down?"

"Don't know," answered Martin. "The ground just gave way. Get the torch out of the school bag and shine it down."

She tore open the buckles of the satchel and snatched at the torch, clicking it on before she had it clear of the bag.

"Can you see it?" she asked, shining the bar of light down into the depths.

"Yes," Martin called up to her, coming into the beam of light.

Far down in the crater Jane could see the top of Martin's head. He was clinging with both hands to an overhanging rock, while all around him the light clinker and small rocks were forming landslides and showering down into the heart of the deep pit.

"Take the straps off the school bag," Martin called up; "and you'll find Scruff's chain in the bag, too. Join them together and then let them down; I'll try to climb up by the light of the torch and grab them."

He had already started to pull himself up to a high piece of rock that jutted out above his head.

Jane ripped off the straps and joined them securely to Scruff's chain. To this she added the thick leather belt from her waist, making a "rope" several yards long. She let it down over the side and held her torch as a guide.

"That's fine," Martin told her. "You'll have to pull me up, though, because there's nothing to catch hold of; the rocks have all gone, and there's only a steep side left. Give the end of the strap to Scruff and both of you pull hard when I say 'Go'.

Jane wriggled the end of the strap through the side of Scruff's mask, and felt him grip it firmly with his strong teeth. She held on tightly with both hands as near the end of the leather as possible and waited for the word "Go". In a few seconds it came, and slowly the girl and the dog pulled with all their strength, not daring to loosen their grip until they saw their companion throw one leg over the crater's edge. In fact, Scruff refused to even then, and went on shaking the strap as if it were a rat.

Jane sat back on her heels, panting with exhaustion, and watched Martin dabbing his grazed hands with his handkerchief.

"We'll have to be more careful," he told her; "the ground in some parts must be as thin as an eggshell. I took a step and just crashed down into that hole."

"Why didn't you shout?" Jane asked. "How did you expect me to find you?"

"Shout?" he answered indignantly. "I should jolly well think I did shout; but the odd thing–or one of the odd things–about the moon is that our voices don't carry far: it doesn't matter how loudly you shout, it sounds like a whisper. I heard you faintly once, but it seemed as if you were miles away. Anyway, dear old Scruffy heard me."

He bent down and patted the excited dog, who was capering about with joy at having his beloved master restored to him.

"I never thought I'd find you," said Jane; "it was awful. I wonder you didn't cut yourself badly, too: you fell such a long way down the crater."

"The ground is so soft that I simply slid down. I grazed my knuckles on the crater edge when you hauled me up," he answered. "Anyway, we're all safe and sound again."

"Where are we going now?" Jane asked.

"Oh, down to the valley," Martin answered. "We'll go and see what it's like, and then I suppose we'd better find our way home to the 'Luna I': we'll be pretty tired by then, I expect. I wish I knew what day of the week it was!"

"Day of the week!" echoed Jane. "We don't even know what month it is."

"We must simply make our days and nights when we go to sleep and when we get up," Martin answered. "Our greatest loss was the chronometer: there was no way of telling how long we were on our journey. Now, be careful how you go down this slope. I've a feeling there is a huge

crater underneath, and only a thin crust of ground covering it. Keep to the places where there are fairly big boulders, because the ground must be firmer there, or else they would fall through," he cautioned her, leading the way down the rough bank to the valley.

They made their way slowly, having learnt their lesson from Martin's mishap, by jumping from rock to rock. Although they could leap a great distance, it took them a long while, for the path was steep. As they came nearer the valley their voices echoed faintly, but in a much higher key than their natural voices. The acoustics on the moon would take a lot of understanding, thought Martin, as he stood surveying the wonders of the landscape below him.

An exclamation from him brought Jane to a standstill.

"There"–he pointed downwards–"there is one of the greenish patches."

Far below them clumps of greenish bronze showed between the grey, lace-like tracing of the lava, forming into tree shapes, giving the effect of a grotto. Martin forgot his caution and began leaping down the slope, heedless of Jane's cries. She followed him at the same speed, grumbling to herself, but not wishing to be left behind.

"Really," she thought, "Martin is the worst trouble on the whole moon!"

And, to make matters worse, it was no use shouting to him.

At last they reached the foot of the slope and were on much firmer ground. The shadows here were sharper and clearer. Everything looked as if it had been cut out of cardboard, like Christmas decorations glittering in the light.

The pathway through the valley was swarming with

moon ants. They crawled aimlessly and blindly over the uneven ground, like dry twigs stirred by a breeze, tumbling over and over each other. So far this was the only sign of life–if it could be called life–that the travellers had seen. Apparently these strange insects existed only in low-lying places; for they had been first discovered under the cliffs earlier in the exploration, and now they appeared again in the heart of the valley. Martin was anxious to climb one of the mountains–perhaps other kinds of life existed–but there were many things to discover here in the low country first.

The greenish patches which Martin had seen from the slope seemed farther away than he had first thought: they now appeared to be hidden by the tall, tree-like shapes that spread their branches overhead, forming archways not unlike the silver birches of the earth. Martin put up his hand to break off a cluster of "leaves" to add to his specimens, but instead of finding these fragile-looking branches brittle and easily broken, they were as strong as steel. He grasped the cluster with both hands in his endeavour to break it, but without success. He took off one of his heavy shoes and hammered at it. After a while a small fragment fell to the ground. It proved to be of a hard, white substance like asbestos, that flaked off when he scraped it with his clasp-knife. He also took a little of the ground ash and added it to his store. By now there were several envelopes, carefully marked, in his coat pocket. He wrote, "Ash found in the 'Luna Valley' " on the envelope and stowed it away.

One of the curious things was that although they had had no food or drink since they landed on the moon, they had no inclination either to eat or drink. This fact did not occur to them until Martin put his hand in his pocket and found a forgotten piece of chocolate.

"Do you know, Jane, we've had nothing to eat since we landed on the moon?" he announced.

"No," answered Jane, "I suppose we haven't. I don't feel hungry, do you?"

"Well, no," he said, "but all the same we might as well have something to eat now we've thought about it."

So the first picnic party began on the moon.

Jane took out two pieces of cake from her store and handed one to Martin. He bit it; it was like trying to bite a lump of granite. They looked at each other in astonishment. Martin unscrewed a bottle of ginger beer. Instantly the air was drawn from the liquid, and it vaporised, leaving the bottle dry. It was obviously useless to attempt to eat or drink outside their cabin. Martin was right when he said they couldn't tell what would happen until it did! For no experienced interplanetary traveller would have thought of eating or drinking in the open at the height they were, and with no pressure of air from above. After some argument they packed the remaining food away and continued their journey.

The journey through the valley was peaceful and uneventful. Both Martin and Jane had added specimens of the objects in their path to the little store of envelopes in Martin's pocket, which was beginning to bulge, for there were many different varieties of ash and "moon plant". The plants were all of the same hard substance as the "trees", and specimens could only be taken by fairly strong hammering with Martin's shoe. Jane managed to find one large, feathery spray, which she carried proudly. She intended to give it to her mother as a "holiday present": they always gave presents to their parents when they went on summer holidays, and this one would surely be an important one to add to the store of strange things that

filled Mill House. The two explorers seldom spoke of the earth, their home, or of their father and mother; but often as they walked along the uneven moon paths in silence their thoughts wandered back to the things and people they loved. Jane, who had less of the adventurous blood in her veins, would have joyfully started back to earth at any moment; but Martin, great as was his devotion to his parents, had no wish to return until he had completed his exploration, which meant seeing as much of the moon land as he could before the relief party arrived. His thoughts would wander to Major Topham and Cyril. This always cheered him up, and drove away any sadness that might stray into his mind.

A long, rumbling vibration of the ground made Martin put out his arm, drawing Jane to a standstill. A huge boulder came hurtling down the slope, followed by a shower of ash dust. Some of the branches snapped from the lava-trees with the concussion. In the distance an enormous mountain appeared to be suddenly sliced down the middle, then disappeared, leaving a gap showing the inky, star-dusted sky. Owing to the strange sound-recording of the moon, one felt the sound rather than heard it. After a few moments the rumbling began again, this time from the opposite side of the slope over the ground which they had just travelled.

"What can it be?" whispered Jane.

Martin shook his head.

"A landslide, I suppose. I don't know what else it could be. It's not likely to be a thunderstorm here. Anyway, it's miles away from us, so there's nothing to worry about: we'll just push on through the valley."

He let go of her arm and they set off once more.

The curious thing was that at the first vibration all the moon ants had disappeared: one by one they wriggled

their way underground, like crabs in the soft sand of a sea-shore. There was not one to be seen. The blind, stupid, crawling creatures seemed to possess a sense of danger, and at the first sign of its approach had crawled to a place of safety underground.

The explorers were too intent on watching the last of these stick-like insects wriggling to safety to notice the vast cloud bearing down on them from the heights of the slope. They thought at first that it was a dust-cloud, but remembered that, as there was no breeze, it obviously could not be dust. Something touched Martin's forehead above his mask, scratching him sharply across his temple, then something else brushed across the eye-holes. Jane gave a little scream and shook her hair: tangled in her curls there seemed to be something that moved. Scruff barked, and tried to snap at an unseen object. Martin held out his hand and snatched at the air. He opened his hand and saw a long, twig-like shape with wings–they were in the centre of a swarm of flying moon ants fleeing from the mountain landslide to the safety of the valley. Jane grabbed Martin, and they both fell flat on their faces in the dust of the road, the winged ants flying blindly over them, blundering against the metal rims of their masks. Martin raised his head at intervals, trying to see through the dense mass of insects. He had managed to capture one, which he added to the specimen store.

The swarm went slowly and noiselessly on its way down the valley, disappearing in the distant twilight. Martin rolled over on his side and watched the tail-end of the cloud as a few stragglers followed the main swarm. These creatures of the air, like their ground brothers, had also scented danger. Jane sat up and shook her hair. A few ants fell out, and took wing to join the rest of their companions far away down the valley.

"You may be King of the Moon," she said to Martin, "but I don't like your subjects!"

"Well," laughed Martin, "if every king has as little to complain of in his subjects as I have, they would have nothing to complain about. I don't even have to make any laws for them: they make them themselves! And they seem to be too peaceful to fight, so there wouldn't be any wars. No, I'm quite satisfied with my subjects, thank you, Jane. Anyway, they are yours, too; for if I'm the King of the Moon, you must be the Queen!" he added, standing up and giving her a low, courtly bow.

"Who's Scruff, then?" asked Jane, with a curtsey.

"Oh, Scruff's the Chief of Police: think of all the detective work he did when I fell down the crater," answered Martin, bringing his heels together and saluting Scruff, who yelped his acknowledgments.

"And Tessie?" asked Jane, again determined that her cat should not be left out of the list of appointments.

"Poor old Tessie is just one of those people who pay enormous sums of money to watch processions from windows and grand stands and get bored half-way through it and go to sleep!"

"Don't be so horrible, Martin," Jane defended her cat. "She hates the cold, and anyway we couldn't fix an oxygen mask on her, so she has to stay in the 'Luna I'. It's not fair to say things like that about her."

"All right, Tessie likes it as much as we do," said Martin. "Now, let's be off again."

He shouldered the satchel, and away they went round the bend of the road, where Martin was to solve the mystery of the greenish patches seen for so long only from a distance.

The road bent sharply to the left, and they found themselves on the fringe of a dense forest of what ap-

peared to be gigantic gorse-bushes, only more segmented, and of a deep green bronze. The lava had formed into a half forest, half grotto, with deep caverns outflanked by the tree-like shapes. No silvery light penetrated through its darkness. Only here and there the high light of the tallest trees could be seen. Whereas everything else on the moon had been in grades of silvery grey, this place was in grades of deep greys, bronze and black–truly a formidable sight after the beautiful valley, with its lace-like trees of lava and its soft, grey, ashy road.

The travellers stood on the fringe of the forest until their eyes became accustomed to the darkness. They looked at each other and shivered, for the cold was becoming intense. So far they had not found it a great deal colder than the coldest night on the earth. It's true the temperature was below freezing point, but they were wearing all the clothes that they had brought with them, and had been moving briskly; but here the ice-cold seemed to cut through their clothes, although there was no wind.

Martin saw Jane hesitate, and buttoned his coat collar closer to his throat.

"Come along," he said gruffly; "it's too cold to stand still. Anyway," he added craftily, "I expect it will be warmer deeper in the forest."

Their eyes were accustomed now to the darkness, and they were able to make their way carefully over the rough ground strewn with lava branches and boulders. There was silence everywhere in this ice-cold, desolate land, but somehow it seemed greater here, shut in by vast caverns and tree-shapes that were not trees, and for once they could not see the sky.

"Well, there's one thing solved–the mystery of the green patches we saw on the journey. I suppose there are

huge forests like this all over the moon: there must be, or we couldn't have seen them so clearly from so far off," Martin said, trudging along ahead of Jane. " I wonder if I could climb one of these trees. I could make a good survey of the landscape from the top; and they are so hard, like steel, that the branches wouldn't break. I'm sure——"

"You can do that at any time," Jane broke in; "the main thing is to find some place to sleep. I feel so tired that I can hardly walk a step more," she told him. "It's much too far to go back to the 'Luna I' now, and we don't feel hungry. I'm sure one of those caves would be warm enough. We could put Scruff between us like a hot-water bottle."

"Yes, that's a good idea," Martin answered, suddenly realising how tired he was. "Let's find a nice, warm, well-appointed cave."

There were plenty to choose from, but far from warm or well-appointed: a more gloomy and uninviting choice for a night's rest would have been difficult to find. Each one seemed more unfriendly and forbidding than the last, as the weary searchers flashed their torch into the dark, silent depths.

"We'll have the next one we find," Jane said firmly, "no matter what it's like: we'll go on like this all night–or all day, whichever it is," she added despondently.

She was cold and tired, and her mind was returning to her warm and comfortable bed on earth, with her bed-side lamp shedding its soft amber light, a hot-water bottle for her toes if she was cold, a glass of hot milk, and her mother to tuck her in snugly. The cold, shivering girl sighed as she followed her brother into the huge, dark cavern.

"There!" he said. "This is our hotel for the night. It's

not so bad," he added, more cheerfully than he felt, for it was a dreary-looking place.

The lava walls, cracked and seamed, stretched far underground, and disappeared into inky darkness, and small showers of ash and clinkers were still falling round them from the vibration of the recent landslide. One would have expected the usual smell of damp and decay, rotting vegetation and small, crawling, living things; but, as in every part of the moon, there was no smell and no sound.

Scruff was investigating every corner and scratching energetically in holes and crevices in the wild hope of a stray rat. Suddenly he stopped, with one paw in the air and ears cocked; he gave a whine, and then returned to his excavation.

Jane looked round their weird lodging for a likely place to sleep. There were plenty of smaller caves leading underground, and if they were not exactly cosy, they were at least not so bleak as the main cavern. She chose a shallow cave where the ground was free of rocks and the lava dust soft and thick.

"I think this one will do, Martin," she said, falling into his mood of forced cheerfulness–after all, there was not much sense in quarrelling. "If we get close to each other, and Scruff curls up between us, we'll be quite warm. How long will the oxygen cylinders last in our masks?" she asked him.

"Well, as we haven't any means of telling the time, I don't know; but as we'll be back in the 'Luna' tomorrow, we'll be all right."

"I'll be glad to get back into the open space," Jane said. "This place looks a real haunted cave."

"Perhaps it is," answered Martin thoughtlessly–"haunted by the Man in the Moon!"

"You don't think it is haunted, Martin? Not really haunted?" asked Jane quickly.

"No, silly, of course not: what could it be haunted by? And there don't seem to be any ants about, so we won't have them crawling over us while we're asleep. I don't think it's a bad place. Anyway, I'm too sleepy to bother," he added, with a yawn. "Hi! Scruff," he called; "come here; be a hot-water bottle!"

The obliging terrier scuttled across the ground and settled himself down between them. They unpacked the old car rug and tucked it round them, and after buttoning their overcoats tightly at the throat, and sharing the school bag as a pillow, they were snugly asleep in a few minutes.

Something ice cold brushed Jane's forehead. She stirred in her sleep. A soft, icy touch by her ear made her turn over on her other side, murmuring in her sleep, and putting out her hand. . . .

A stifled scream woke Martin with a start.

"What?" he cried sleepily. "What's the matter? Did your . . .?"

He stopped and stared straight in front of him. He soon saw the cause of Jane's scream, and put his arm round the trembling girl and looked slowly round the cavern.

Chapter XI

EVERYWHERE he looked there were eyes. In each corner eyes peered at him from the darkness; from behind rocks and from cracks in the dimly-lighted walls. Sometimes a single eye stared unwinkingly. Some of them disappeared instantly, as if a light had been switched off, and reappeared in another part of the cave. Swiftly and silently these eyes moved: they seemed to be suspended in mid-air and unattached to any body. The lighter parts of the cave were free; it was the darkness they seemed to cling to.

A sight like this would chill the hearts of the most courageous boy and girl. It was only the fact that each knew how terrified the other was that made them brave. They clung to each other, watching, not daring to move their earthly eyes from these unearthly ones. Scruff by now had set up a furious barking, the hair on his back bristling with rage; but the creatures–if creatures they were–seemed either deaf or completely unconcerned by the noise, for they took not the slightest notice, but kept up their steady stare.

"The torch, Martin," whispered Jane; "switch on the torch."

Martin fumbled in the darkness beside him and felt the welcome cold metal torch-case, and rapidly switched it on.

The eyes that came into the beam of torch-light "went out" instantly, as if blinded by the glare; but reappeared as quickly somewhere else. As the light reflected on the ashy ground, Martin thought he saw a faint outline attached to one of the pairs of eyes; but it was gone in a flash, leaving a patch of inky darkness.

The numerous peering, lamp-like eyes increased; every rock and crevice appeared to be guarded by one of these weird sentinels that shone with the same brilliance as the moon when clear of the earth's atmosphere; but the brilliant light shed no rays or reflections: it was as if so many holes had been cut in the darkness, with a light placed far behind them.

Scruff had ceased barking, and was contenting himself with sharp growls like minor explosions, and Martin, now that he had got over the first horrified shock, was trying to think of the best way either of ridding the cavern of these ghastly creatures, or escaping into the forest beyond. They had slept for they didn't know how many hours, and felt refreshed; but the problem was how to escape, for the entrance of the cave was guarded by these watchers. It is true so far they appeared harmless, but they had the advantage; for Martin and Jane were cornered, with their backs to the lava cave, and the only way to move was forward.

"Will you pack up our things, Jane?" said Martin; "and I'll take pot shots at the eyes with the light from the torch. If we can clear them from the path leading to the entrance we'll be all right. There's nothing to be afraid of,

really," he told her. "They seem quite harmless: in fact, it might be only a trick of light, and not anything alive at all," he assured her, but he knew it was not true.

Jane packed up their stores and rug, while Martin flashed his torch this way and that, "shooting out" the eyes with the beam of light, until there was a clear path through the cavern.

"Now," he said, slinging the school bag over his shoulder, "put Scruff on his chain, or we'll lose him in this darkness, and then make a dash for the entrance. Follow me, and I'll light the way."

It all sounded so simple. "Make a dash for the entrance." From the ground at their feet more eyes sprang into sight: wherever the torch-beam failed to search, something peered and stared at the two figures as they stumbled through the gloomy cavern to the forest beyond.

They sank down on the ground with relief as soon as they were clear of their sinister lodging. The forest was not exactly a cheerful place to wander in, but at least it was free from unseen things that peered and pryed from behind stones and wall-cracks.

"Well, we're safe now," said Martin cheerfully. "I think we'll just return to the 'Luna I' and pick up some stores, and then . . ."

He stared over Jane's shoulder. A pair of eyes gazed at him from behind a lava tree.

Jane looked swiftly over her shoulder. Several pairs of eyes had appeared, but they were no longer still: they seemed to fly through the darkness, swooping and diving; but were extinguished when Martin flashed his torch on them. They hung for a few moments in the branch-like formations of the lava-trees, and then either disappeared or swooped to the ground.

"I think they are following us," said Martin quietly;

"but I don't think they mean any harm, whatever they may be. I'll clear the way as I did when we came out of the cave, and we'll make a dash for the road. Keep hold of Scruff, and follow me as closely as you can."

He began to pick his way over the fallen branches and boulders, flashing the torchlight in circles.

The extreme darkness made progress slow, and several times the anxious wanderers tripped and stumbled over the rough ground. The way through the forest seemed endless. Martin was beginning to feel uneasy about the path they were taking. All the lava-trees seemed alike, and there was no reflection from even the smallest patch of sky.

An icy touch on his forehead made him duck his head and flash his torch upwards. In the rays he caught sight of the strangest object he had ever imagined. Its gnarled body was like a piece of tree-root about eight inches long, and running down the creature was a kind of fin that waved as it flew through the darkness, giving it the appearance of a fish swimming. As it flew out of the torch rays the eyes lighted again. Martin was able to see in the flash of its rapid charge that its eyes were enormous–out of all proportion to its size. It flew swiftly and noiselessly, then disappeared in the branches high over his head.

"I've seen one, Jane," he cried excitedly; "it's up there in the branches."

He pointed upwards, and they both stood trying to pierce the darkness with their earthly eyes.

As soon as Martin's torch was inactive the curious half-bat, half fish-like creatures clustered round them, brushing against them and entangling themselves in Jane's hair. She struggled frantically to get them free. Martin switched his torch on her and saw the blind, struggling creatures round her head. It was certain now that they

would attack, but what harm they could do remained to be seen.

When the last bat was free, Jane tied her scarf tighter round her head, and they started off once more in search of the road through the valley. Martin knew by now that they were lost in the forest; but trusted to regaining his sense of direction before it occurred to Jane that they had missed the right turn of the path. He stumbled on with set teeth. He had been so concerned with keeping the bats off that in the darkness his mind had strayed. If only he could be certain that these things were harmless he would simply concentrate on finding the right path.

"Martin," said Jane, "are you sure we're going the right way? It's taking much longer to get out of the forest than it did to come into it."

"I'm afraid we've missed the path," he answered; "but don't worry, we'll find it. I'm sure we are in the right direction."

He was quite reckless about the number of reassuring lies he told her: he had a guilty feeling always at the back of his mind that it was he who had brought all this trouble upon her; and she was the most patient and courageous companion. He'd find that road, he told himself savagely, if it was the last thing he ever did in his life.

The light from the torch was beginning to show faintly yellow, but in their anxiety in keeping off the bats and trying to find the lost path neither Martin nor Jane had noticed it. It was not until the first flicker of light that Martin examined the lamp with an exclamation of dismay. The bulb was going deep amber, and there was only a tiny point of light left on top of the copper filament: this meant in a few minutes utter darkness, and, with the darkness, the bats.

The two looked at each other without speaking as their only means of protection flickered faintly, turning amber to copper.

"Come," cried Jane, "let's go as far as we can until the battery runs out completely–every yard farther on means a few bats less!"

Martin gripped her arm without answering and stumbled on ahead, using the light only when there were a pair of eyes close to them. After a few minutes there was complete darkness.

The first sign of direct attack was a sharp stab on the back of Martin's neck. It was only like a deep pin-prick, but enough to show that these creatures were not as harmless in the dark as they were in the torch-light. A yelp from Scruff told them that he had not escaped. In a short time the blows were frequent and more painful, as the numbers of the bats increased, peering and stabbing at the two figures who stumbled on through the darkness.

Martin, groping his way along the dark forest path gathered two lava branches from the thickly strewn ground, and with these weapons they tried to beat off the flying and diving creatures. Neither spoke a word during their flight, and the only break in the silence was the dull vibration when one of the branches hit a bat, or a muffled yelp from Scruff when he felt a prick on his ear. He was protected to a great extent by his thick, wiry coat, but his ears were exposed.

It was impossible even to try to find their way through the darkness, so the two stumbling figures ran blindly on, Martin leading the way as straight as his good sense of direction would let him. Having once lost the right path, it meant leaving it to fate.

A cry from Martin brought the stumbling flight to a halt.

"The sky!" he cried. "Look through those trees!"

He pointed through the darkness, forgetting that Jane could not see him, but what she did see brought tears of relief to her eyes.

Far away in the distance there was a faint, silvery light.

On they ran. The forest was becoming lighter now, and the bats had decreased considerably in numbers and boldness: only an occasional nip hampered the two figures running at top speed towards the lighted road, leaving the sinister black forest with its watchful eyes behind them.

They stood on the outskirts of the forest and looked back into the darkness. A few pairs of eyes glared balefully at them from a distance, not daring to venture beyond their lair of cold and darkness.

They threw themselves down on the light, powdery road and grinned at each other through their masks. It's a curious thing how quickly fear and danger are forgotten once you reach safety. Martin and Jane sat on the roadway watching the lighted eyes flitting in and out of the trees: with fear far away at the back of their minds, they watched the scene of their adventure.

"We'll have to think of a name for that forest," said Jane. "A horrid name."

"Yes," answered Martin, nodding, "a horrid name. I think, 'The Forest of Watching Eyes' would be the only name."

Jane agreed, and another part of the moon was named.

"We've a long climb ahead of us," Jane went on, "so I think we had better renew our oxygen cylinders. Even at the rate of moon travel it will be more tiring uphill than down, and this slope is very steep. There is a spare cylinder fixed under the microphone of each mask; I found out how to use them while you were prowling round the

'Luna I' that day. . . ." She paused. "I wonder how long ago it was?"

"I've wondered that ever since the chronometer stopped working," answered Martin, disconnecting the partly used oxygen cylinder and throwing it far into the darkness of the forest. "There are plenty of new ones in the 'Luna I'. I suppose they were left there by mistake, like the radio set was."

He screwed a fresh cylinder to his mouth and began searching under the microphone attached to Scruff's mask.

Martin entered the adventures in the forest in his log, and after a short rest they were once more on their way. The road was familiar to them, and they were already at the spot where they had entered the forest, and were able to pick up the trail of their footprints on the dusty road which guided them to the point of the slope where they had started their climb down to the valley.

"We'll have to go a bit slower," Martin told Jane, as they started off up the slope leading to the beach road where the "Luna I" lay waiting for them, "because our trail is not so easy to see here as it was on the valley road."

"No," answered Jane–"in fact, I can hardly see it, and there seem to be heaps more rocks and boulders than when we came down the slope. I suppose we are going the right way?"

"Oh, yes," Martin said; "here are our footprints. Don't forget we're looking at the slope from a different angle: we're looking up now, so the rocks seem to tower over us. We can't miss our way as long as we keep to the trail we've left."

But in spite of the reassuring footprints a feeling of uneasiness crept over him. The trail was most certainly

there–the trail left by their footprints when they came down the slope on their way to the valley–but here and there an unaccountable gap in the trail puzzled him. There was no wind to disturb the dry, powdery ash, but all the same the trail had been disturbed, and there was a slightly different appearance about the slope. He dismissed the doubts from his mind–no, of course he was wrong: there were only two sets of human footprints and one set of dog-prints on the whole moon. It was that silly remark of Jane's that put it in his head. Of course they were on the right trail.

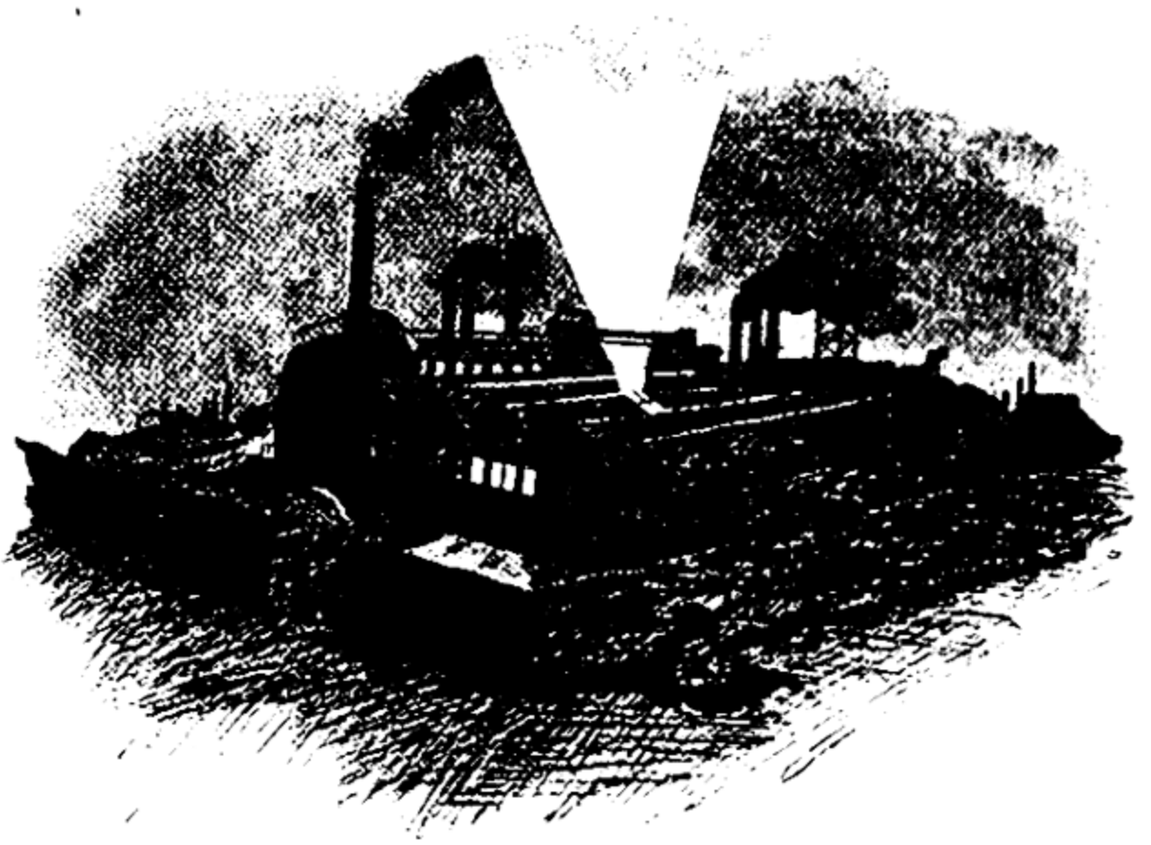
"Nearly at the top, Jane," Martin called to her cheerfully. "We can see the mountains now, and we'll be home in the 'Luna I' in time for tea!"

"Won't it be odd having meals at the proper time again," said Jane, "and going to bed when it's dark, and getting up when it's light?"

"Well, won't everything on the earth seem odd at first?" answered Martin, climbing up a huge boulder at the very top of the slope.

He stared round him with wide-opened eyes, and could scarcely believe the sight that met his bewildered gaze.

The whole landscape was completely changed. Where a mountain had been a short time ago now yawned a dark crater; huge rocks filled the wide plain, and the cliffs no longer rose beyond them, but had become a shapeless mass of rock and dust. And the trail of their footprints had been entirely obliterated by the gigantic lunar landslide.



Chapter XII

MAJOR TOPHAM had been striding up and down his study while the Professor talked. He suddenly stopped and glared at the serious, black-bearded man sitting in the armchair facing him, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of the last one.

"But why wasn't I told all this before?" Major Topham demanded furiously.

"Because," answered the Professor, with weary patience, "it was only discovered about an hour ago. I was making an inspection of the engine-room with Sergeant Hodson when he drew my attention to the main fuel tank. I had it removed, examined it, and found it damaged; telephoned Salters, who made the tanks, and they are sending down Ian Watson, the engineer who helped me to design them. He should be here any minute. If anyone can suggest anything he can: he knows his work from A to Z. You know as much about it as I do now."

The Professor looked despondently at the glowing tip of his cigarette.

"But how could it have happened?" went on Major Topham. "Fuel tanks don't go wrong by themselves. Hodson was in charge——"

The Professor glanced angrily at the blustering man in front of him.

"There can be no blame in any way attached to Hodson. Someone broke into the rocket shed and tampered with the engines and tanks–I don't say with any wrong intention, but the fact remains that someone did. I'll have no blame thrown on to anyone in charge of the aerodrome," the Professor said firmly.

"Are you sure someone broke into the shed? Are there signs of any damage–apart from the tank?" Major Topham asked.

"Yes," the Professor answered, "some of the boarding has been removed and replaced. Enough for a small boy to get in."

For a moment Major Topham stared at him blankly; then an expression of mixed understanding and rage spread over his face.

"Are you accusing my son of tampering with the fuel tank?" he burst out.

"I've not mentioned your son. I told you the hole made was only large enough for a small boy to crawl through," the Professor answered quietly. " I merely wanted to point out to you that as there are obvious signs of an entry, all people concerned with the rocket are clear of suspicion."

Major Topham seemed to swell in height and breadth as he furiously pushed the bell by the mantelshelf. It was answered almost instantly by a rather scared-looking parlour-maid.

"Tell Master Cyril I want him. Here. Quickly!" Major Topham snapped at her.

"Yes, sir," she answered, and withdrew rapidly.

"I should go carefully, Topham," warned the Professor, getting up slowly, "for, after all, what does it matter who did it? We're only wasting time. The main thing is to get on with the repairs."

"I'm going to find out who did it. There's been trouble ever since the beginning, and if I find out that I've been hoaxed by another boy. . . ."

Major Topham's voice seemed to disappear in a strange gurgle.

The Professor peered through the study window in the hope that he might see Watson coming up the drive. A great deal depended on the engineer's opinion of the damage–more than he had told Major Topham. It was no use causing anxiety until he was sure of his facts. He was not sure how much damage had been done to the tank, but it was certain that it was unwise to try to launch the "Luna" with a faulty tank. He looked at his watch impatiently. What on earth could Watson be doing? Every minute meant more delay in repairs. If it could be done in a day, or even two, they would be all right. But longer . . . He ground his cigarette out savagely. And here was Topham trying to find out who did it!

Cyril slid round the half-open door and grinned sheepishly at his father.

"Did you want me, Father?" he asked nervously: the parlour-maid had warned him that "the master was in a way!"

"Sit down!" roared his father.

Cyril sat on the extreme edge of a hard chair and shuffled his feet. The sight of the Professor made him uneasy. This was not going to be a small matter of eating

cakes in bed or being caught listening at a key-hole. He smiled innocently at his infuriated father.

"When was the last time you went to the aerodrome?" asked his father in a slightly calmer tone.

This gave Cyril the courage needed to lie.

"I don't remember. Oh, not for ages," he answered brightly.

"When did you go to the . . ." thundered his father.

"Yesterday," Cyril corrected himself hastily. He was getting really scared now.

"Did you break into the rocket shed?" his father went on.

Cyril began to cry in loud sniffs and gulps. The Professor was beginning to feel extremely sorry for him; for even if he had damaged the tank, it was unlikely that he had done it on purpose.

"Stop that noise at once and tell me what you did to the fuel-tank," shouted his angry father.

Cyril's sniffs and gulps stopped immediately, out of sheer fright, and he stammered out his story.

"I didn't mean to break the tank. One of the little nuts came off, and then the kind of rod things on the side fell out, and then . . ."

His voice trailed off.

"I don't want details like that," said his father, shaking the unhappy boy. "Why did you do it?"

"Well, I took George Wingrove to the aerodrome, and he was laughing at me because of Martin Ridley going off in our rocket, and he said he'd bet anything he had that I'd never even seen the 'Luna' and wouldn't know anything about how it worked if I had; so I broke one of the boards of the shed and took him into the engine-room." He stopped and looked round him fearfully, "And then–and then I turned on the engine switch and showed him the tank, and we messed about a bit with it . . ."

His story was cut short by the entrance of the parlour-maid announcing Mr. Ian Watson.

"Ah, Watson," cried the Professor, crossing quickly towards him, "you've never been more welcome."

He introduced the sandy-haired engineer to Major Topham, and the three men settled themselves to discuss the serious business which had brought him post-haste from London.

"This is indeed bad news," said the engineer in his slow, Scottish accent.

He shook his head drearily.

"Yes," answered the Professor, "very bad; but we're relying on you to tell us just how bad it is."

"Well, I examined the tank as soon as I got down to the shed. It looks to me as if it is a case of sabotage, of course–just wanton damage." He paused. "I hope Major Topham will deal severely with the criminal, if ever he's found."

"I will," said Major Topham firmly, and glared at his wretched son, who was wriggling about in his chair. "Go to your room, Cyril, and stay there till I send for you," ordered the angry father.

Cyril slunk thankfully out of the room without even a sniff.

"There is hardly a firm nut or bolt in the whole tank," continued the engineer. "Briefly, it's useless."

"Will this mean building a new tank, or can the existing one be repaired?" asked the anxious Professor.

"We can repair this one, but it's going to delay you. It's no use going into details. You know, Professor, as well as I do that you can't fly with a faulty tank."

The Professor nodded slowly.

"How long will these repairs take?" he asked.

The engineer screwed up his eyes and considered the question for some time before answering.

"I should say," he answered, weighing his words carefully, and driving the Professor nearly mad with suspense–"I should say about four or five days."

The Professor got up from his chair and took a turn up and down the study. He was the only one of three men who fully realised what this delay meant. He returned to his arm-chair and looked steadily from one man to the other.

"The delay of four or five days will have the most disastrous consequence," he said quietly. "A day, or even two days, and we might be safe; but four or five–fatal." He began nervously scratching his beard the wrong way. "We'll be too late. You see, the 'Luna I' was delayed in her course longer than we expected. She was timed to land on a certain part of the moon at a certain time. Well, we know she did not: she landed a great deal off her scheduled time. The moon won't stand still because of earthly mechanical breakdowns: it's turning all the while towards the sun. If we delay our departure for more than two days, by the time we arrive the moon will be in the full glare of the sun, and all hope of rescue will have vanished. We couldn't even land, because of the heat. No, no, friend, it's too late."

He began his rapid walking again.

"Well, we'll have to wait until the moon's in the right quarter again, I suppose," grunted Major Topham disgustedly.

"And in the meanwhile what is going to happen to the boy and girl?" asked the Professor angrily.

"There must be craters or caverns for them to shelter in from the heat," answered Major Topham, waving his hand about vaguely.

"I agree, there may be–conditions there may be a great deal different from what we imagine–but even if

they shelter from the extreme heat that we know exists, what about their supplies of food? They can't have much left. And their oxygen supplies? They can't live without it for weeks while we're waiting here for the right moment to launch the rescue rocket. If it takes every engineer in the country we must have that tank repaired within the next day or two days at latest!"

The Professor threw himself once more into his armchair and glared at the engineer, who was calmly making notes and rows of figures on the back of an envelope.

"But, Professor, there are things you don't realise," the engineer said. "The metal used for the tank is not ordinary metal. We can't simply make a tank from steel. That particular metal was smelted especially for us, from our own formula. As far as I know there isn't an ounce of it left in the world: we'll have to smelt what we want. It's not the labour that's the difficulty, it's the material."

"I'll guarantee a double week's wages to every man working on the smelting if they can produce it in two days!" said Major Topham.

The engineer shook his head despondently.

"All the money in the world won't make a furnace burn or metal cool any quicker. Well, I know what's to be done," he said, preparing to leave, "and you can rely on me to produce that tank in as short a time as possible."

"I know," the Professor assured him, shaking hands gratefully. "There is no man I would rather have undertaking this serious business than you, Watson. But never forget for one moment that the lives of that boy and girl are endangered by every hour of delay. If it has to be, I'll fly by myself with a faulty tank!"

And the Professor never made an idle statement.

"Did you come down by road or train?" he asked the engineer.

"Road," answered the engineer briefly.

"Well, you can drive me back to London with you. There are a great many things to discuss, and it will save time if we talk on the journey. Are you going back to Salters?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Right. I'll go with you."

And the Professor and the engineer turned towards London, and Major Topham walked rapidly upstairs to his son's bedroom.

The long black car ran smoothly through the raw, foggy autumn afternoon, carrying the engineer and the Professor to the engineering works on the outskirts of London where the first tank for the ill-fated "Luna" had been made. As they left the borders of Kent the fog became thicker, making the lights in the windows of the cottages and shops look like blurred lamps hung in mid-air; and the car headlights struck the road like grey chalk-marks through the heavy mist. The engineer was forced to slacken speed in spite of the grunts of impatience uttered every few minutes by the Professor. The Professor was an Irishman, and had never learnt patience except while he was experimenting. The engineer was a Scotsman, and had learnt patience and endurance while he kicked and screamed in his wooden cradle high up in the mountains of Northern Scotland. They were an ill-assorted pair, these two friends who turned and twisted their way through roads and villages, over bridges and hills towards the city and the huge engineering plant that hummed and whined. Both knew that no power on earth could make it move one split second quicker. The vast leather belts and dynamos were adjusted to the exact speed which enabled them to do their work, and no matter how fast the Professor's heart beat or

how great the need, nothing could make them work faster.

The two men hardly spoke on their journey, the engineer giving all his attention to the fog-banks in front of him, and the Professor lighting one cigarette from another, his thoughts thousands of miles away above the swirling fog, where his two young friends were marooned while their danger was growing every hour.

"Can't you make this thing go any quicker?" he asked the engineer.

The engineer shook his head and made no attempt to gain speed.

"Two live men are more useful than two dead ones," was his reply.

"I'm sorry, Watson," the Professor said; "but I realise the importance of getting these repairs completed more than you do. All the time we're driving the moon is turning slowly towards the sun. The sun is death to that boy and girl, the only two living creatures on a whole planet. It's all very well for Topham to say they might shelter in a crater or a cavern: he doesn't realise that the whole moon will be hotter than boiling point. There may be unknown conditions, I admit, possibly caverns out of the heat, but they will starve from lack of food or suffocate from lack of oxygen. If I can get safely launched within the next two days I may be able to rescue them. After that . . ."

He shrugged his broad shoulders and stared moodily through the windscreen at the fog.

Somewhere from a river a fog-horn moaned its warning. The Professor shivered, and for the first time regretted the years he had spent designing and building the "Luna". It takes a great deal of despair and misfortune to make a scientific man regret a great invention.

The engineer swung the long car-bonnet through the gates of "Salters", avoiding with difficulty the crates piled up on either side of the cinder path. Men streamed through the lighted doorway of the works, fanning out over the yard on their way home from the day's work, some laughing, some coughing in the fog and turning up their collars, others stopping to light pipes or peer through the darkness for a friend. It was Friday night, and there was a good deal of cheerfulness in anticipation of Saturday–Saturday meant football, working on an allotment, taking their families to the cinema. Also Friday night was pay night.

The engineer sprang out of the car and climbed to a pile of near-by packing-cases.

"Stand by in the yard for half an hour," he roared through his cupped hands. "Please." He added. "No man is to leave without permission. This will be treated as double overtime pay for every man who has been kept back."

He jumped down, and was through the works' entrance, followed by the Professor.

The men stood about in little groups wondering what the order could mean: each man had his own idea.

"Someone's been murdered," announced a shock-headed youth of seventeen.

"Don't be silly! Someone's stolen something," argued a small man in a cap.

"Perhaps we're all going to get a rise in pay," laughed a big fat man cheerfully.

"Hum," grunted a sour-looking friend standing beside him. "A rise out of the yard, more like it."

Everyone laughed at this melancholy joke: they were used to Dismal Dan. The waiting men stamped their feet, rubbed their hands and shivered in the cold, raw, night air,

thinking of their high tea and warm cottages. But double pay for half an hour would be welcome next Friday.

Meanwhile a little group of men listened to the engineer's report; the Managing Director, the works manager, and a young engineer who had assisted in making the original tank. There was a few minutes' silence after hearing the news: no one seemed to know how to act. The shrill ringing of the telephone broke the inaction, and everyone began talking at the same time. The Managing Director, after bellowing "Wrong number" down the mouth-piece, turned to the engineer.

"You're in command, Watson," he said. "Everything else must stop until this tank is repaired. Pick any men you want out of any workshop and give any orders that you think fit." He turned to the Professor. "Professor Erdleigh, we'll do our best–that is the only thing you can be certain about. If it is humanly possible to repair that tank in time for you to begin your flight in two days' time it will be done."

The Professor grasped the outstretched hand in front of him.

"I know, Salter. I know. This flight is not one of adventure: it's a rescue squad, and every minute counts."

His voice shook slightly from anxiety and gratitude to his friends.

"The secret of the disaster can no longer be kept," the engineer said firmly. "If I tell my men that they are merely to repair a tank they'll work–oh yes, they'll work –but if they know what is at stake they'll work with a will. They have sons and daughters and a sense of responsibility. There's not a man amongst them who will not work night and day until our repairs are completed. It must be the same at the smelting works: no secrecy from the men whose help we need."

There was a chorus of agreement as the engineer hurried from the Directors' office in search of a megaphone.

The waiting men in the works yard watched the tall figure of the engineer clambering up the pile of crates. He looked vague and shadowy through the thick yellow fog that swirled round him, making his form appear bigger than it really was: he seemed to be a giant as he stood far above them, holding a hurricane lamp in one hand and swinging the long megaphone in his mouth. There was no need to call for silence–a hush had fallen on the crowd of men below, waiting expectantly for news.

"I am going to pick ten men"–the engineer's voice rang clearly through the fog–"ten men who are prepared to work by my side and endure long hours with lack of sleep, and eat their food while they work. Men whom I can call my friends for the rest of my life.

"The work I have for them to do is no ordinary repair work: it is a matter of life and death to a boy and girl.

"You've all heard of the voyage of the 'Luna I', the rocket which was fired to the moon? Well, in that rocket there were two stowaways, a boy and his sister. We know they have reached the moon; but they are unable to return to earth unless a rescue rocket is fired. That rocket must be fired in two days' time at the latest, or these two travellers will perish. Up there"–he swung the lantern above his head–"above the fog, thousands of miles from earth. The rescue party, on inspecting the relief rocket, have discovered a damaged fuel tank. That tank must be repaired within two days, otherwise all hope of rescue is gone. Have I any volunteers?"

His questioning voice rang out louder than ever.

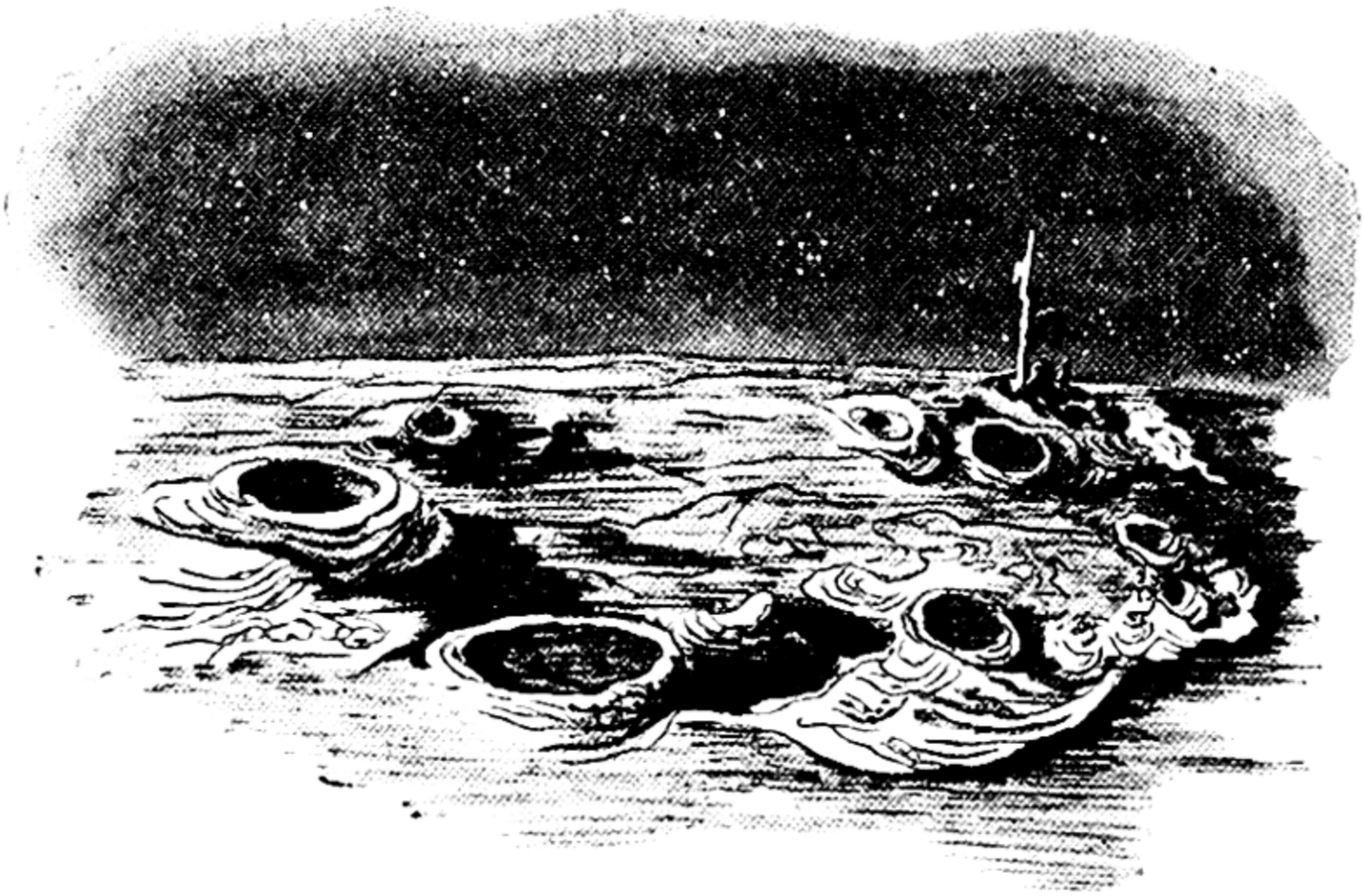
The echo of the engineer's voice had barely died away when the whole crowd of men broke into an uproar. Pushing and jostling each other in their eagerness to be

the first to volunteer, amidst shouting and arguments they surged round the pile of crates, calling their names up to the breathless engineer, who looked down at them with gratitude and pride. He had worked with these men for many years, and knew them well enough to feel confident of their loyalty.

"I want ten men, not fifty," he called down to them; "but the men who are not picked will never be forgotten."

It was useless to speak any more, as the words would have been drowned by the cheers that came from the shadowy forms through the raw night as the engineer picked his men from the crowd who had volunteered as one man.

The lights in the buildings went out one by one, until there was simply one huge triangle of dusty light that spread up from the glass roof of the main workshop and struggled through the fog. The blurred yellow light cast no rays from the windows where men were working in their race with the sun.



Chapter XIII

THE two young explorers had become accustomed to the ups and downs of fortune, for in exploration on the earth or any other planet there is more bad fortune than good, and for a long time after the discovery that their trail back to headquarters they were quite cheerful and philosophical about it. Martin felt at this stage of their journey that as long as they saw as much of the moon as possible it did not matter a great deal where they went; Jane agreed that as long as they found somewhere to sleep they would be all right. Martin tried to make a rough calendar for their sleeping and wakenings, but abandoned it: time, like speed, seemed impossible to calculate, so life became a series of sleeping and waking and searching for their lost trail. But they were beginning to feel the lack of food. Hunger was now added to their other misfortunes. Scruff, of course, always fell in with anyone's mood as long as it meant movement, and so the adventurous trio toiled on their way, clambering over giant boulders and

hill-tops, avoiding craters and the shifting ground. The after-effects of the landslide were still apparent, and a careless step might mean disaster.

It was very difficult to gauge one's sense of direction in this strange world where there was no wind or colour, no sound or smell, and where everything looked so much the same. It is odd how wind, colour, and smell affects one's sense of direction, apart from landmarks and familiar sights; but here the landmarks and familiar sights no longer existed, and so the two travellers crossed their fingers and left it to fate; and as fate so far had been kind to them, they felt, for the time being, safe.

Something whizzed past Martin's head and fell with a sharp, soundless impact on the ground a few feet away from him. The party halted. This was the first movement apart from the insect and bat life, they had found anywhere since they landed. In a few seconds fragments of various sizes were showering down on them like rain driven from one direction. Some were about as big as a man's head, others tiny particles of grit which stung any part of their flesh unprotected by clothes or masks. Martin pushed Jane, and they both fell on their faces in the ashy dust. As about a million meteorites fall on the moon in twenty-four hours, they were very fortunate in not having encountered a meteorite shower before this. They crawled along on their faces to the protection of an overhanging boulder and crouched behind it, holding the dog between them. They heard nothing, but felt the impact of the fragments as they hit the boulder and surrounding ground. A tiny, jagged piece which looked like black iron grazed Martin's ungloved hand. It healed instantly as the moisture from the blood vaporised, leaving a dark smear. The shower stopped as suddenly as it had started. Martin looked cautiously from behind the rock, expecting

to see the ground strewn with fragments, but the force had buried them far down in the soft ash–only a few smaller pieces lay on the flat rocks and clinker boulders. He reached out and added one of the tiny jagged lumps to his collection.

"It's over," Martin said, stretching from his cramped position. "I think the sooner we climb to that mountain top the better." He pointed to a steep rise in the ground. "We might get an idea of where we are."

They shook the ash from their clothes and began their long climb.

On the summit of a mountain slope Martin set up his telescope and viewed the surrounding landscape. The landslide had laid bare many stretches of huge bronze-green lava forest, but after their experience of the bats, these forests were to be avoided. They had no wish for another fight with the strange moon creatures: there were too many things on hand, and Martin wanted to keep his mind clear for picking up their lost trail. The meteorite shower had made a diversion, and he was feeling fairly cheerful; but having no means of telling the hour, day or week, he had no idea of the danger that was approaching them.

A movement under Jane's foot made her start back. Out of the grey ash something wriggled and turned. At first it simply made a series of tiny hillocks that appeared and disappeared slowly; then a sharp point pierced its way through the surface of the mountain path, freeing itself from the ash with the slow, graceful movements of a snake. This upheaval of the surface was preceded by thousands of moon ants fleeing in all directions, tumbling blindly over each other. Jane called Martin from his telescope to watch this new happening.

The sharp-pointed object had now grown into a snake-

like creature about as thick as Jane's arm, and built up out of rough, rocky segments. It was of a uniform grey, and looked like lumps of pumice stone strung together with cord. It wormed its way to the surface, crushing the fleeing ants like a tank crushing stones into a road, as it proceeded slowly on its way down the mountain side. As Martin and Jane watched it, other hillocks appeared, following swarms of unfortunate moon ants. Scruff pounced on one large moon snake about four feet long that was writhing its way over the soft ground, but his oxygen mask prevented him attacking it; and he had to be content with worrying it with the metal cap of his mask. The snake turned its head and tail upwards suddenly like a scorpion, and it was only the dog's nimble legs that enabled him to escape being caught between the pincers. With a yelp of rage he jumped clear and set up a furious barking–but from a safe distance.

Martin hurriedly packed up his telescope. This was the last kind of encounter he wanted. All round him the snakes were seen moving underground, making tiny mounds and hills before crawling to the surface; and, like the bats, these creatures were anything but harmless. Jane followed Martin and Scruff rapidly down the mountain slope either to safety or danger from another cause: they did not stop to think which. It was curious how all the insect life in this lunar world kept to its own particular zone, except the ants: they seemed to thrive everywhere. But the snakes kept to their mountains, and the bats to their forests. And up the slope from the valley came a swarm of winged ants on their return to the mountain tops, which they had left only to escape from the danger of the landslide. Now the mountain was safe they were returning to their nests in the cracks and crevices of the lava rock.

The mountain slope was so steep that Martin and Jane sat back on their heels and slid toboggan fashion until they landed sprawling at the bottom of a path, a little giddy from the tremendous speed of their flight.

"Safe for the time being," cried Martin, shaking the ash from his shoes. "I think we'd better keep to the valley road: the mountains are too full of wild life!"

Jane nodded in agreement. In fact they agreed in everything now–the idea of quarrelling never entered their heads. Misfortune, in an odd way, always draws people together who share it.

"We may as well simply go on walking; we're bound to pick up our trail at some point: the landslide can't have destroyed everything. But I wish we could have something to eat," she answered rather despondently.

"I've never agreed with you as much!" Martin said heartily. "And I've never felt more hungry in all my life! Oh, for the sight of cook and the kitchen."

"Don't," said Jane sharply. "I'm beginning to feel sick."

It was Jane's remark that made Martin suddenly realise the new horror which might descend on them at any moment. They had started out with one extra cylinder of oxygen each, and they had connected these to their masks while they were on the fringe of the forest. He remembered the cylinder which he had thrown carelessly away before making certain how much oxygen there was left in it. It was impossible to calculate how long these fresh cylinders had been connected, as days and nights were simply endless twilight: they slept when they were tired, and woke in the cold, grey light. He must keep these new thoughts to himself. He knew he could trust Jane not to panic; but, all the same, there was no sense in two people having this thing on their minds. He picked

up a small clinker and threw it high into the space beyond him. Scruff darted after it in great leaps. He thought of the road leading to the woods–woods, not lunar forest; tea, the six o'clock news on the radio–not hunger and endless twilight. But the mighty mountains surrounding him, the remembrance of the things he had seen and the unknown things he would see before he left this cruel, cold land quickly killed these earthly thoughts.

Their progress was rapid and uneventful. Either side of the valley road loomed high banks of lava ash, with boulders jutting out from the soft surfaces. Now and then one would become dislodged and roll down the slope, bringing a shower of ash with it. A clump of bronze-green forest could be seen as the bank sloped, but neither Martin nor Jane had any wish to explore these gloomy heights. It was on one of these slopes that Martin kicked against a hard, stony object: it was a dead moon bat. This was indeed a find; for he wanted one of these horrible creatures to add to his store of specimens, but was reluctant to catch a live one. The two wanderers rested by the roadside and examined their find.

It was about fourteen inches long from nose to tail, and seemed to be of a hard, rock-like substance; in appearance not unlike a small crocodile, but without the long jaws and muzzle. Its nose was thick and short, like a pig's snout. Close to the head were a pair of bat wings, now closed and limp; and large eye-sockets out of all proportion to its size. The eyes were now covered with heavy lids in death; but a thin, white streak showed where they were only partly closed. These were the lamps that had added to the terror of the forest. Its rocky body ended in a sharp spike of a tail. Evidently this spike was used for attack, for the point felt as sharp as a needle. And, like all other creatures and vegetable matter on the moon, it was

of a grey colour, dry and stony. They were both extremely excited about this new specimen, and Martin stowed it carefully away in the satchel among the pork pies and rock cakes. Explorers can't be fussy, he said, in answer to Jane's protests. Anyway, if the food ran out they would probably try to eat the bat! This brought an exclamation of disgust from Jane, who vowed she would rather die of starvation than eat one of those frightful creatures; but all the same she agreed that this specimen must be preserved at all costs, and suggested that they really ought to hunt for a moon snake as well. This idea was welcomed by Martin as he bounded up the bank to the area where they had found the snakes. Jane and Scruff followed their leaping leader to join in the snake hunt. All round them the ashy ground was moving in little mounds made by the snakes as they writhed their way to the surface. The hunters had to go carefully, as they were by no means sure that these underground creatures were harmless: in fact, the segments of broken tails strewn about the ground gave sign of many a fight between the moon reptiles.

Scruff was enjoying himself thoroughly; digging at the little moving mounds with his front paws and doing his best to blow at them through his oxygen mask. This was the nearest thing he had had so far to a rat hunt, and his quivering tail showed plainly how much he longed to get his sharp white teeth into one of the snakes as they slowly pushed a spiked head out of the ground. It was no use collecting any of these broken snake-tails, for Martin, with all his collector's instincts, roused by the finding of the complete bat, insisted on adding a complete dead snake to his natural history museum of the moon. From behind a boulder came the sound of growling, barking, and scuffling. It was the old familiar growl of Scruff when

he had tracked his rat. Martin was over the boulder in one leap, and there was Scruff, with his oxygen mask on the ground several feet away from him, at grips with a large moon snake about three feet in length, and as thick as a bicycle tyre.

Heedless of his master's shouts, the fighting terrier held on to the snake, slipping and floundering over the dry, ashy ground, shaking his enemy in spite of its turning and twisting. Several times it threw its tail and caught the dog's back, sinking the sharp tail-tip into the harsh white fur of Scruff's hind legs; but his terrier blood was up too much for him to take the slightest notice, or, if he did, it only made him fight more furiously. At last there was a "snap" and dog and snake rolled over on the ground together, both motionless. Martin and Jane rushed to Scruff's limp, furry little body and gently lifted his head. His breath was coming in feeble gasps, and his eyes stared up at them. Martin snatched the oxygen mask and held it over the exhausted dog's nose. After a minute his breath became normal and his stumpy tail wagged rapidly. He was feeling very contented and happy about life; he had been free of his hated mask, had had a very good and successful fight and was now being petted! As soon as the victorious dog's mask was re-tied to his collar, Martin turned and examined the dead snake. Scruff's strong teeth had snapped the knotty cord that supported the rock-like segments of the curious-looking reptile. Now it was safe to examine it, it looked for all the world like lumps of rock with holes bored through them and strung on knotted rope. The head and tail resembled sharpened flint arrow-heads. No one seeing the thing now would ever have believed that only a few minutes ago it had lived and moved about in its strange, ashy world, burying itself underground and wriggling to the surface, fighting

battles and crushing the harmless blind moon ants with its long, stony body. Martin coiled his latest treasure as small as possible, and it joined company with the pork pies, rock cakes, and the dead bat.

The party left the mountain slope with all speed, for the snakes were growing in numbers, and the mounds made by their burrowings were only a foot or two apart. Scruff had to be fastened to his chain on the way down to the road, as he refused to leave this hunting-ground. All Jane's promises to find "dear Scruff something else to hunt" fell on deaf ears as the reluctant hunter was dragged down the slope, snarling whenever he saw an inviting-looking quarry.

Back on the road once more, Jane's spirits rose: the excitement of the snake hunt and the joy of Scruff's recovery made her feel cheerful and light-hearted. She had all her work cut out, too, to keep the excited dog from darting back up the slope; for, after the manner of terriers, he found it difficult to forget a good hunting-ground. But Martin felt a growing uneasiness as he gazed at the winding road for some trace of their lost trail. To lose one's trail is a thing that happens to most explorers at some time or another. But to lose it on earth is one thing: on the moon it is a thousand times worse. On earth one has in most cases means of finding shelter or food, and the elements you have to fight are more or less accustomed ones; but here, in the arid land devoid of food, where there was very little shelter except in the bat-ridden caves and forests, and life without an oxygen supply was impossible, misfortune might become tragedy. He was thankful that Jane had her mind occupied with Scruff, so that he had time to think, without having to make conversation.

There was another fear stirring in his uneasy mind.

Although they were still on the valley road, with high banks either side and sheltering them, the light was changing: it was several tones lighter than it had been earlier when they first left the forest. This could mean only one thing–the approach of the sun. The cold seemed less, too, and the ants had almost disappeared. He glanced at Jane. She was loosening her coat collar. He bit his lips nervously and stared straight ahead.

The road ended abruptly. On one side stretched a wide plain, its flatness unbroken by boulders or craters: as far as the eye could see there was nothing except grey, ashy desert; even the mountains seemed to have disappeared. On the other side the ground sloped gently, ending in rocks and boulders, forming caves. Here, at any rate, there might be shelter.

They toboganned down the slope and landed sharply against the pile of lava rocks. Martin was on his feet in an instant, but Jane still sat back on her heels: she seemed a little breathless.

"Do you think we could rest a little while, Martin?" she asked.

Her breath was coming rather quickly.

"Yes, of course," he answered. "Do you feel all right?"

She nodded.

"Only a bit out of breath, and giddy. I expect we came down the slope too quickly."

She took a deep breath.

"I expect we did," Martin answered carelessly, but with the awful fear creeping into his heart and brain. This was the beginning: Jane's oxygen supply was the first to give out.

Chapter XIV

He sat down beside her and tried to think clearly. Should they push on as quickly as they could? But where? Which way? Or should they rest in the caves? No, they must continue as far as possible: something might happen. He crossed the fingers of one hand while he helped Jane from the ground with the other.

"Come along," he said cheerfully; "the 'Luna I' may be round any corner."

They clambered over the huge lumps of pumice stone, never varying in colour, sharp and rough here. It seemed the most likely direction to take; for even if the plain had been the right one, the "Luna I" had most certainly disappeared, for nothing broke up that cold, unfriendly-looking desert.

"I do think we ought to rest," said Jane, stopping in her climb. "I feel awfully tired."

She sank down on one of the rocks and loosened her woollen scarf.

"All right," answered Martin, "let's find a cave."

He led Jane into the first one in sight and sat down beside her. Scruff followed, and curled up between his

knees. He pulled the black-and-white ears absent-mindedly until a muffled yelp made him drop his hand. As he looked at Scruff, he suddenly realised that he might have to make yet another decision. The dog was breathing naturally and easily. If Jane's mask gave out, he would have to choose which must live: his sister or his dog. Never in his life had he loved his sister and his dog more; but there was no question which life he must save. He took his beloved terrier in his arms and looked at his sleeping sister, then got up from the ground and climbed the towering rocks with his telescope strapped to his back.

He returned to the cave after an unsuccessful survey of the country. He could find no familiar landmark as far as he could see. They must have strayed into another region entirely, he thought, as he looked at his sister, who was still asleep, with Scruff curled up beside her. The dog lifted his head as soon as he heard his master's footsteps close to him, then got softly to his feet, without waking the sleeping girl, and rubbed his head against Martin's leg. The welcome made the troubled boy's spirits rise a little, and he sat cross-legged in the entrance of the cave.

He felt a tight feeling across his chest, and unbuttoned his coat, still staring out on the pile of rocks in front of him; he coughed softly, but the tightness remained. Then he realised what it meant: his oxygen, too, was running out.

All his despair vanished, giving way to anger and desperation. The earth had not stopped him doing the thing he'd planned to do, and neither would the moon. If he should die it would be on his own native planet; not on one where no other human being existed, where he could not fight for his life, but would simply lie down and wait for death to overtake him. He bent over Jane and found she was still asleep, but breathing so slowly that he

could hardly see her moving. He scrambled to his feet and signalled to Scruff to follow–Scruff had always been his firm ally in misfortune–and they climbed up the opposite side of the rocks.

Martin found his movements slowing as he unstrapped his telescope and fixed it firmly on the lava plateau at the highest point of the rock pile. He set his teeth and turned his telescope slowly round.

The sky had lightened during the last few hours at a considerable rate, and the cold was disappearing rapidly. Some of the distant mountain peaks were reflecting a more brilliant light: it was no longer the soft, silvery grey, but much whiter and harder; the shadows were sharper, too, as if a strong light was behind them. The meaning of this change of light was only too obvious. He had no means of telling the day, week or month, of how long their journey had taken, or the length of time they had been on the moon; but he was certain now of one thing: the lunar dawn. Two weeks of freezing night to be followed by two weeks of scorching day. He thought of his close vision of the sun. To be suffocated or burnt, that was their fate. He savagely swung the telescope in the opposite direction.

A blinding flash, like the sun reflected on a mirror, made him draw back suddenly. He put his eye to the lens again. There was the brilliant reflection in the far distance. He stared with his naked eyes in the direction of this blinding light, and could see it now quite easily. What in all the world can there be on the moon to attract such brilliance? he wondered. It looks like a mirror in the sun–or very shining. . . . He gave a cry. . . . Metal! Of course there was only one thing in this dead world that could shine like that! His "Luna I"! His ship!

He packed his telescope in its box with shaking hands,

hardly realising what he was doing. The tightness across his chest was more intense and his breath was becoming short; but he seemed oblivious of the physical things. The "Luna I" was in sight: safety for Jane and Scruff and for himself. He clambered and slid over the rocks, panting slightly when he jumped to the ground, closely followed by Scruff, who felt the excitement of his master.

"Jane!" he called, bending over his sister. "Jane! Wake up! I've found the 'Luna I'." He shook her gently as she opened her eyes drowsily. "Can you manage to walk just a little way more, dear?" he asked–"not far. We'll soon be home."

He helped her to her feet, and stood with his arm round her as she drooped limply against him.

"The 'Luna I'?" she said, her breath coming in short gasps. "Where?"

She slumped sleepily on his shoulder.

He bit his lips: they must make it, they were so near to safety.

"Come along, Jane," he said, sharply, "lean on my shoulder."

And they stumbled together out of the cave.

The brief survey of the surrounding country was photographed on his mind–he could have followed the course with his eyes shut. Fortunately they had a stretch of fairly clear country in front of them, and travel on the moon is rapid. In spite of the loss of breath and the half-fainting condition of Jane, Martin set out on the road with a light heart. It's true that you can't live without oxygen, but it's also true that you can't live without hope, and the two exhausted explorers fought against their failing strength with the knowledge that close at hand there was temporary safety. Then Jane sank suddenly to the ground, falling in a heap at Martin's feet.

She was still breathing, but appeared to be asleep. Martin's first thought was to take off his mask and fix the oxygen tube to Jane's–there was still a certain amount of oxygen left in his–but as he unbuckled his mask he realised the foolishness of this, and hastily re-fixed it firmly to his head and, shifting the telescope case and satchel to the ground, he bent over his unconscious sister.

With a tremendous effort he managed to lift her and, bending almost double, hoisted her over his shoulder in a "fireman's lift", and tottered slowly and carefully on his way. The tightness across his chest had now become a pain–not a sharp pain, but one which made him sleepy, and he breathed feebly. As he toiled up a rise in the ground the brilliant reflection from the "Luna I" caught him full in the face: it seemed so near. He rested a moment in an attempt to gather strength, but his knees began to give way, and he lowered Jane gently to the ground. It was no use, he thought. Perhaps after a few minutes rest. . . .

Scruff began scratching at the senseless girl and yelping. He pushed his nose into Martin's hand, then capered round Jane, trying to take her skirt in his mouth. Martin watched him drowsily until it occurred to him what the intelligent terrier was trying to tell him. He fumbled in Jane's pocket and found Scruff's chain, and fixed it firmly to his sister's leather belt; then he unbuckled the canvas belt from his waist and joined it to the chain in the same way that Jane had done when, with Scruff's help, she had hauled him out of the crater. The dog watched him intently, with one paw lifted and the tip of his stumpy tail quivering, ready to snap at the end of the canvas belt that Martin was preparing to slip through the oxygen mask.

"Good old Scruff!" whispered Martin between his gasps. "Never-in-all-the-world-a-dog-like-you."

Martin felt Scruff's strong teeth snap on the end of the belt pushed inside the mask, and with the renewed strength that hope gave him, rose from his knees, and together the boy and dog hauled their senseless companion towards the rocket, which shone like a harbour light in the approaching sun's rays.

A few yards from the "Luna I" Martin dropped the belt and signalled to Scruff. Stumbling and panting, he reached the cabin door. With a mighty effort he wrenched open the catch and groped blindly for two of the spare masks while he tore his own from his face. In a few seconds he was breathing deeply the reviving oxygen as he stumbled down the ladder to the small, still form of his sister, guarded by the gallant terrier who had helped to save her life.

The mask had been on Jane's face for only a few minutes before she began to move. Martin knelt beside her, rubbing her frozen hands and calling her name. He had almost regained his normal strength, but he was feeling tired and shaken; and Jane had been in a far worse state of exhaustion, and recovery was slower.

"Don't move, Jane," he said gently. "I'll carry you over my shoulder back to the 'Luna I', and you can lie in your hammock."

"Are we really home?" she asked him sleepily. "I kept on dreaming we were back in the 'Luna I', and then I knew we weren't. What happened, Martin? I don't remember: it all went dark."

"Don't talk," he told her, hoisting her over his shoulder. "I'll tell you all about it when we get home."

For somehow the "Luna I" seemed more like home than any place in either world at this moment.

For the first time since their arrival on the moon, the two travellers were sitting comfortably in the rocket cabin and free of their oxygen masks; for the air-conditioning tubes over the hammocks had been turned on, and Martin had been busy preparing a meal–the first meal that they had had for a very long time. They sat back in their hammocks munching corned beef and biscuits, Scruff scratching contentedly between them, while Martin told Jane about the series of adventures that had befallen them while she was unconscious.

"And he's the hero!" cried Martin in conclusion, lifting Scruff high over his head. "I was preparing to give up–but not Scruffy! What a bone you're going to have when we get back to the land of bones and rats!"

At the mention of the hated word the dog wriggled out of his arms and began scratching frantically in a corner, yelping with delight.

"I've got to go back and get my telescope," Martin said. "I couldn't carry it when I had you on my shoulder. The satchel is there, too, but it's not far, and I can follow my trail. I'd better go before there's another landslide!"

"We never found that first trail," remarked Jane. "It's odd that the 'Luna I' wasn't buried."

"Well, it's not really so strange," Martin answered, "because our trail is still there, leading away from the Union Jack, but we lost our way and came round in another direction. Anyway, who cares? We're home again."

He laughed cheerfully as he fixed on his mask and clattered down the ladder and out into the lunar dawn.

Although the temperature was warmer, the appearance of cold was greater. Everything looked harder and brighter, and much of the beauty of the landscape had

vanished with the approaching lunar day, which crept up slowly from behind the mountain peaks, lightening the sky and darkening the deep caverns and crater ridges, and turning the ashy surface of the roads and plains white and bleak. These changes held Martin's interest, as well as his fear, as he made his way rapidly to the spot where he had left–or hoped he had left–his precious telescope and satchel containing the dead snake and bat.

He breathed a sigh of relief into his mask as he shouldered the telescope and satchel–it would not have surprised him in the slightest to find that they had vanished: he was becoming completely accustomed to the strange happenings in this strange land. He stood gazing up at the lightening sky for a few minutes. Of course, if the "Luna" failed to reach them soon there would be another danger to face–a danger with no hope of safety; for they would have no chance of survival when the day broke full on them: even the "Luna I" would be heated white hot. Oh, well, he thought, it's been worth it. But his thoughts strayed to Jane as he plodded his way home to the "Luna I".

Squeals of laughter greeted him as he stepped into the warm, comfortable cabin. The little button lights glowed red over all the hammocks, lighting up the soft, blue, padded walls. Jane's coat was thrown down on the top of one of the lockers, and her bright scarf trailed from a hammock to the floor. There was an air of cheerfulness and untidiness about the cabin, and the friendliness one finds in one's home on a chilly autumn afternoon.

Jane was playing with Scruff and Tessie: she had rolled her handkerchief into a tight ball, and threw it high in the air for Scruff to catch deftly as he leapt and jumped round her, barking his delight. Tessie was looking wildly this way and that, trying to watch the flying ball,

which always eluded her slow movements. Her tail was twitching angrily, and it would be only a matter of a few minutes before Scruff would have to retire with a scratch on his nose. Jane, hot and a little breathless from the game, sat down on the lid of a locker, fanning her face with her hand.

"Poor Scruff and Tessie! It's ages since anyone played with them," she said. "Oh, you've found the things all right."

Martin nodded. Jane's hot, flushed face caught the reflection from the brilliant sky outside. Martin wondered if she realised the danger which was approaching: she seemed oblivious of anything except playing with the dog and cat and his return.

They unpacked their carefully sealed envelopes and laid them out on the locker. They had certainly not overlooked much in the way of specimens, for the locker lid was soon covered with objects. On another lid they spread the ants, bat and snake, together with the feathery frond from the lava-tree, which Jane firmly announced she was taking home as a present for her mother.

"But Mother can see it if it's in a museum," protested Martin.

"No," Jane answered; "she's going to see it in her drawing-room."

"But we could put a card on it, 'Presented by Mrs. Ridley'," grumbled Martin, afraid of one of his precious trophies going astray.

"No," was Jane's answer; "we'll get another for your museum." She broke off one of its branches. "There," she said kindly, "that's enough for a specimen."

Her brother grabbed it before she had time to change her mind.

"Well, I'm going up to see how the land lies," Martin

announced, taking the telescope from its case. "Do you want to come?"

Jane shook her head. She was quite comfortable where she was, and after the series of adventures of the past few days–or weeks, she had no idea which–she preferred a little peace.

Martin settled himself on the highest point of the rocket's spearhead and gazed at the wonders of his newly discovered World–which he had thought of first as merciless; but now he knew it had mercy.

The change in light had added much to the dignity and grandeur of the landscape: it was stronger and even more awe-inspiring than it had been in its soft, silvery light. Martin took a deep breath as he watched from his post the cold, silent land.

His eyes caught the tiny Union Jack hanging limply from its mast far below him, marking the moon as a British possession. As there were no oceans, boundaries, or rivers to split up the land, so it would remain: no country in any world could claim a part of it, no territory to fight over, no claims to argue about. As far as anyone knew, the moon was a useless addition to the British Empire; but, then, as far as anyone knew, the moon was a very different place from the one he knew it to be. Martin's thoughts strayed to the store of envelopes spread out on the locker lid in the cabin. When these were analysed what would they tell him? There might well be unknown minerals in the ash and lava rock which he had collected, and properties in the branches from the lava forests unheard of by any human being. He could see mine-shafts showing black and powerful against the silvery grey of the mountains, and men working, moving to and fro in oxygen masks, blasting rocks and digging deeply in the wide, colourless plains; watching for the

approaching sun–machinery that worked, but would give no echo in the stillness. There was no knowledge as yet of what the outcome of his daring adventure would be: the sun creeping up behind the mountain ranges facing him made the hope of survival seem small. But his heart went out to this land of ash and lava, strange insects and reptiles that hid themselves underground and in dark places. He longed to return one day–and not with a packet of envelopes and a home-made telescope.

A touch on his arm put an end to his day-dreams. He turned and saw Jane standing beside him. She peered at him with serious eyes through the transparent shield of her oxygen mask.

"Martin," she began, "the light: it's so different. I've only just noticed it. It's getting warmer, too." She hesitated, twisting one of the buttons on her coat, reluctant to bring out the words. "Do you think–do you think it means . . .?"

She stopped speaking.

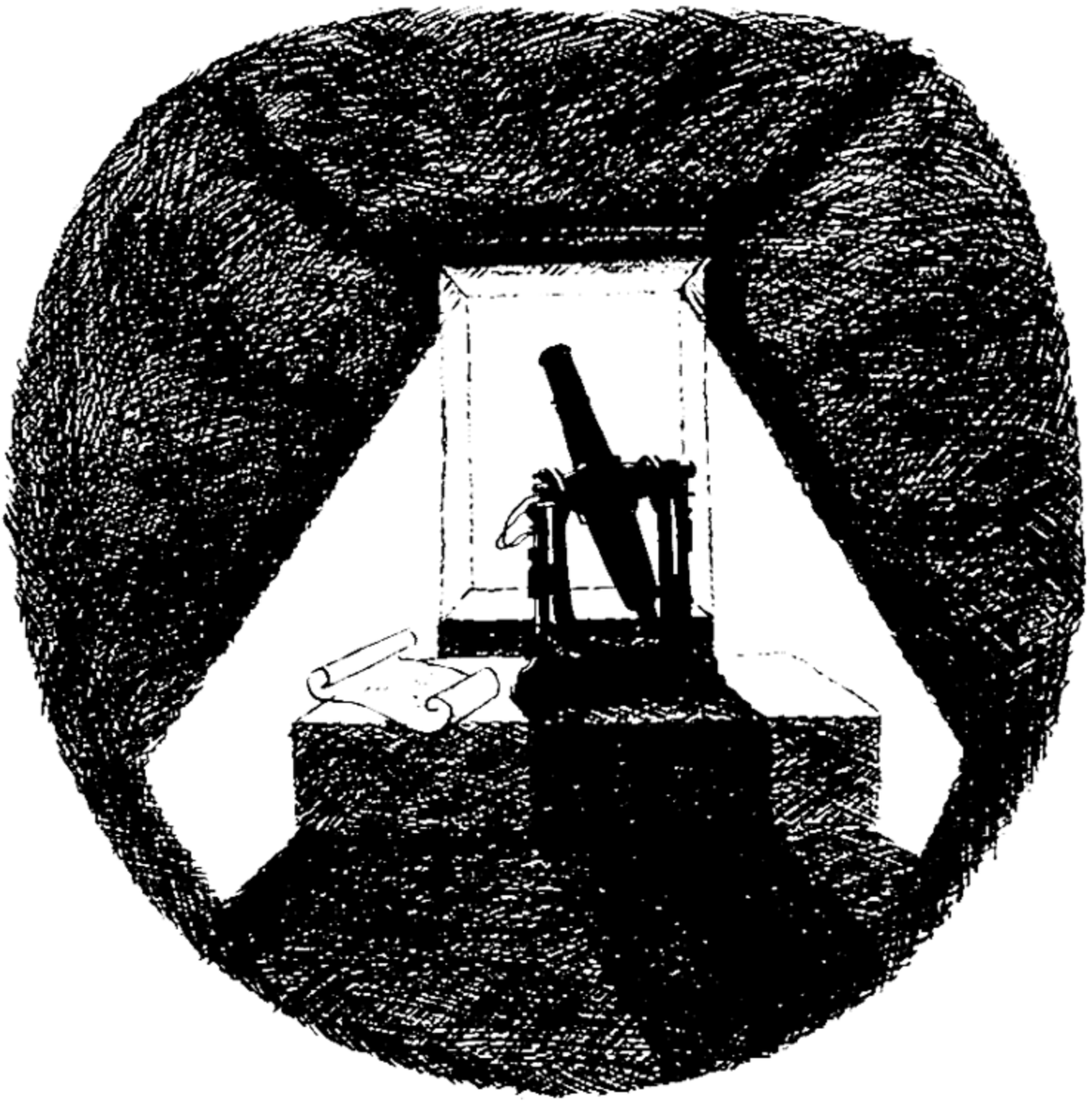
"Yes," answered Martin, getting slowly to his feet. "I think it does. I'm afraid all hope of the 'Luna' finding us before the sun rises has gone. Collect all the oxygen cylinders you can find. I'll stay here on watch, and at the first sight of the sun we'll make for the caves."

He saw a flicker of fear in her eyes.

"I know," he went on; "but it's our only chance–bats or fire, that's our choice."

He gripped her arm for a moment before she slid down the rocket side to the cabin.

Martin waited with his eyes fixed on the lightening sky.



Chapter XV

THE Professor seldom left his post at the window of the "Luna" during the journey through space. Sergeant Hodson attended to his duties, and relieved the Professor of as much anxiety as possible in inspecting apparatus and engines: his burly figure moved slowly and quietly about the cabin. The rest of the crew sat moodily in their hammocks. Mr. Ridley kept his eyes fixed on the inky sky beyond the window until weariness and strain closed them in uneasy sleep. As the Professor had remarked, this was not a voyage of adventure.

The voyage so far had been as uneventful as the "Luna

I's" had been eventful. The scientific members of the party knew more or less what to expect from space, and Mr. Ridley suffered too much anxiety to feel a great deal of interest in his surroundings. It was a silent party that rushed on through the black, starry void, with one thought uppermost in their minds–to race the sun.

The sensitive, beautifully constructed telescope through which the Professor gazed hour after hour contrasted oddly with the home-made one which had served Martin so well during his long and adventurous journey; and it seemed absurd to compare the elaborate equipment which hung near the hammock of each man with the oddments rifled from Mr. Ridley's sea chest at Mill House and packed in school satchels and rucksack. But the fortunes of exploration are strange; and, curiously, it is always the rescue party that has all the good luck and plain sailing.

Mr. Ridley crossed the cabin and sat beside the Professor, looking at him inquiringly. He hardly liked to repeat the question he had asked so many times during the voyage.

"No," the Professor told him gently, "it's still too early to form any definite opinion. I should say the chance is fifty-fifty. We have kept to our course, and so far not encountered a meteor shower." He laid his hand on the anxious man's shoulder. "Don't lose hope. With it you live, without it you only exist."

Mr. Ridley smiled with his mouth, but his eyes remained the same.

The straightness of the course of the "Luna" and the uneventful journey seemed, to the Professor's superstitious mind, ominous. He had lost much of his old optimism during the last few weeks, and he felt this smooth passage was a tit-bit that fate was offering him,

urging him on a voyage that would eventually mean disaster. He still murmured "We hope" and crossed his fingers; but a life-long habit is a difficult thing to break, and it had now become a habit with little heart behind it.

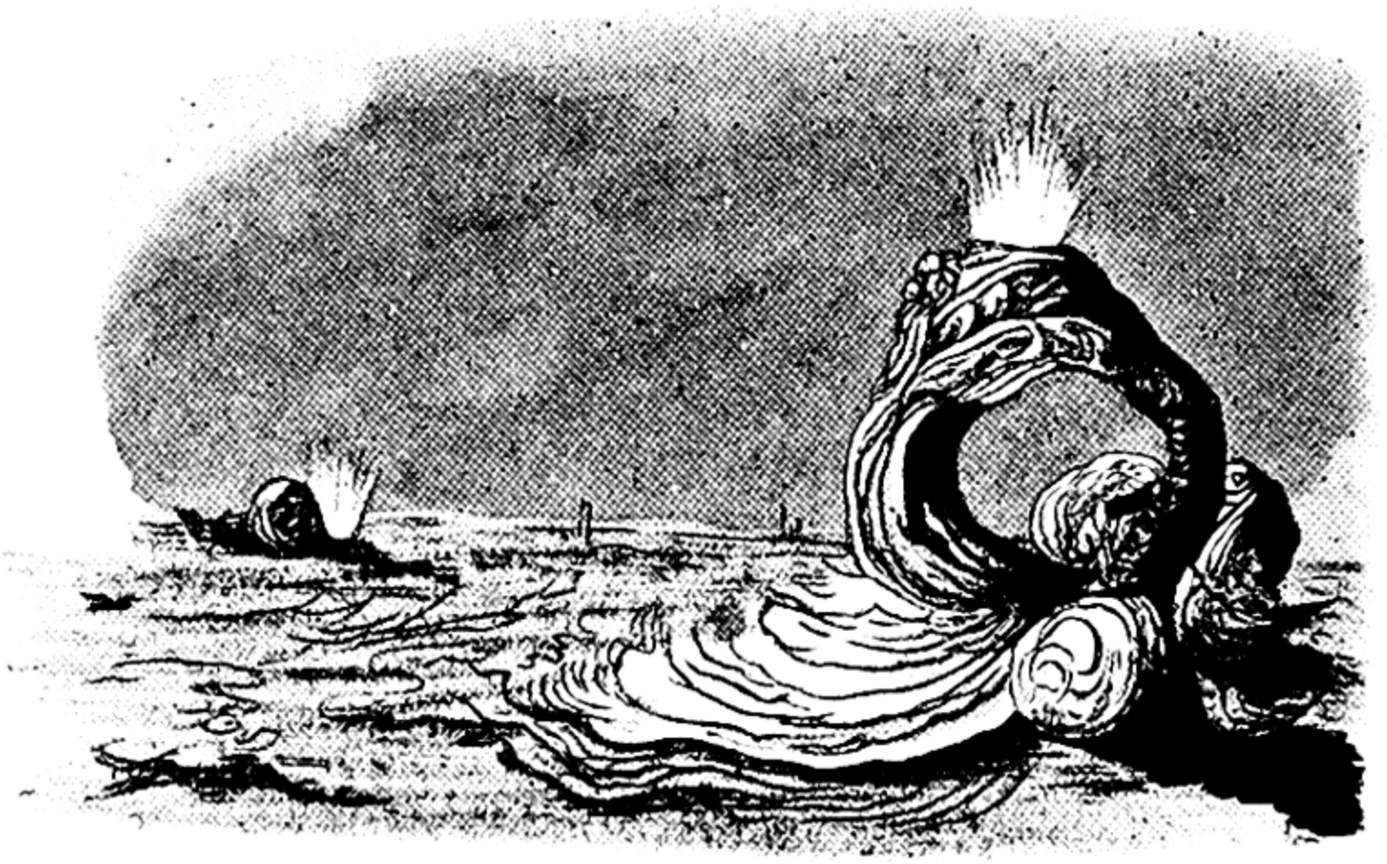
There were moments when excitement of seeing the moon at closer quarters than he had ever done in his life drove the gloomy thoughts from his head; but the relief from care was brief; and the picture of the boy and girl waiting and watching for the "Luna", with the sun creeping its merciless way through space towards them every second, killed his excitement instantly; and his heart went out to his anxious, watching friend who sat staring at the heavens hour after hour, with his thoughts on his son and daughter, who were somewhere on the great shining planet above them.

Sergeant Hodson shook the Professor gently. It was the end of the Sergeant's watch, and the Professor was to take over from him.

"All right, Sergeant," muttered the sleepy man. "All serene?"

"Getting lighter, that's all," returned the Sergeant, and prepared to turn in for his spell of sleep as the Professor took his place by the window.

The sky was a great deal lighter–so light that the moon appeared dim in contrast. Few stars were to be seen, except one or two far away in the distance, too small to see with the naked eye. He glanced rapidly at the chart beside him: his calculation showed him that the sun had been shining for a day and a night by earth time. In a few hours it would shine full on the rapidly dimming moon in front of him. The race against time was on its last lap.



Chapter XVI

JANE, after collecting the extra supply of oxygen, had clambered up the rocket side and taken her place beside Martin, to watch for the first sight of the sun. She had with great difficulty prised the water-tanks from the locker chests, and these, with the unused cylinders of food tablets, were packed in school satchels. They were now prepared to fight the final ordeal of this adventure.

The reflection from the sun crept slowly behind the mountains facing them, turning the plain to sheets of burnished silver, hard and glittering in the rapidly returning day. The travellers watched from their post high up in the "Luna I's" spearhead with the patience that comes to people when they feel certain they are doomed. For, in spite of Martin's decision to make a dash for the caves and Jane's precaution in packing oxygen, water and food tablets, in their hearts they felt they were doomed to die in this world of cold and heat, thousands of miles above their own world.

A point of light far away in the distance made Martin

stiffen and prepare to give the signal for flight. He watched for a few seconds. It was a curious light–certainly no star, for all stars had been dimmed by the brilliance of the approaching dawn; and it could not possibly be the sun: this was a small point of light moving rapidly towards them. What new phenomena were they to witness?

He reached for his telescope, not taking his eyes from the light in front of him. He peered through the lens for a few seconds. The light was changing course, and had a familiar brilliance. His heart beat rapidly. It was bearing down on them steadily, but with no great speed. He watched, fascinated by the light, as if powerless to move or speak.

"Jane!" he cried suddenly, "Jane! I've sighted her–the 'Luna'! D'you hear?"

"Where?" the excited Jane asked. "Let me see."

She grabbed the telescope; in her excitement she shook the flimsy cardboard roll off its tripod, and it fell down beyond the spearhead to the ashy ground.

"We must signal them somehow," Martin cried: "they must have some guide, or they will be wandering all over the moon looking for us. I know. There may be some flash pellets left unexploded. We'll climb to a high point on the rocks and explode them. The Professor will know we're signalling to him."

They scrambled and slid down the rocket side and dashed into the spearhead cabin. Martin filled his pockets with the remaining unexploded flash pellets, and they set out for the rock peak, clambering up the sharp pumice-stone boulders regardless of cut knees and torn fingers. Jane stopped every few yards to lift Scruff to a high point–the height of the rocks were too much for a terrier's small legs.

Martin piled a heap of flash pellets on the flat surface of the rock and undid his shoes.

"Now stand back, Jane," he warned her. "I'm going to hit the pellets hard with my shoe. Cover your eyes up–there's going to be a huge flash."

And for a second time the moon's grey surface was stained crimson.

It was now possible to distinguish the "Luna" with the naked eye, as she rapidly steered her course high over the mountains. After a few minutes Martin exploded some more pellets. He could see her quite plainly now as she opened her parachute wings and tipped slightly sideways before she made her final descent.

"They're coming down, Jane!" cried Martin, dancing with delight. "They're coming down! Look!"

He pointed to the great shining light and prepared another charge of pellets.

"I'll give them a few minutes to land before I let off any more," he told Jane. "If I can find out where they've landed," he added.

A brilliant crimson flash gave him his answer–the same device had been fitted to the spearhead of the rescue rocket to guide the marooned explorers.

Another charge of pellets exploded under the heel of Martin's shoe; it was answered by one from the direction of the landing-flash.

"They've answered our signal, so they know the direction to take," Martin said.

After the first excitement of sighting the rescue rocket he was beginning to feel a little flat in spirits.

A dusty, tattered boy and girl, followed by a grey dog who badly needed a bath, leapt across the boulder-strewn ground to meet the little party of men who trudged towards them through the powdery ash. A tall

figure whose thinness could not be disguised by the heavy asbestos suit and helmet, and whose light grey eyes were distinguishable behind the eye-holes of his mask, made the two explorers stop dead for a second; then rush forward, hurling themselves at the man who stood with outstretched arms to welcome them.

"Daddy, oh, Daddy!" cried Jane, half-laughing, half-crying. "Oh, Daddy!"

She was incapable of thinking of any more words.

Martin stood looking silently at his father. Somehow he felt no surprise at finding him here: it seemed the most natural thing in the world–the world they were in now or the one they would be returning to in a short time, or any other world that they might visit: his father fitted completely with the whole adventure.

Mr. Ridley reached a long arm over Jane's dusty brown head for his son's hand.

"Martin Ridley, I believe," he said, laughing softly.

Martin echoed his laugh in exactly the same tone.

Everyone began talking at the same time. The Professor was in high spirits. He insisted on kissing Jane through his oxygen mask, and refused to loosen his grip on Martin's arm for a second.

"That boy outwitted me once, and I'll take care he doesn't do it again!" he said, with grim good humour.

Major Topham, looking huge and impressive in his elaborate equipment, was fussing nervously round everyone and glancing at the sky, as if he thought the sun would burst on them at any moment. Sergeant Hodson sat heavily down and looked despondently round him.

"What a place to come to!" he muttered under his breath.

Brian Cooke picked up a handful of ash and ran it through his fingers, while Dr. Hobbes looked slowly round for any sight of vegetation. The thoughts of both men

were much the same as they caught sight of Martin. When they thought he had perished, he was a kind of hero; now he was safe and talking rapidly to the Professor, he was the wretched boy who had outwitted the whole crew!

"How long have we before we start back?" inquired Martin.

"Two hours at most, if we value our lives," answered the Professor. "All our talking must be done during the journey 'home'."

"There might be time to take a few specimens," said Brian Cooke, his mind running on minerals.

"I've taken specimens of almost everything I've come across," Martin told him.

"It seems he's forestalled science in all directions," laughed the Professor tactlessly.

The mineralogist and the botanist nodded gloomily in agreement, and began to wonder why they had troubled to take this perilous journey.

"Action," ordered the Professor. "If Martin has any specimens, we must certainly collect them. I'll go back with him to the 'Luna I', and you can all return to the 'Luna'. See as much as you can, of course, but remember the sun. Follow our trail back to the 'Luna', but on no account must there be any delay: we must get clear of the moon in two hours' time."

He waved his hand as he set off with Martin towards the "Luna I".

The rest of the party straggled off in the opposite direction under the leadership of Jane, who was proudly showing off her knowledge of lunar conditions.

"Was it an accident that you landed so near us?" asked Martin.

"By no means," the Professor answered, "We knew by your flash where you were–roughly, of course–and also

by your message from here, so we set course for as near to that spot as possible. The signal you gave us on landing helped a great deal. Oh, how we're going to talk on our way back to the earth!"

They were now at the side of the rocket, and the Professor caught sight of the Union Jack.

"Of course. The moon belongs to us now. Well, you've certainly enlarged the British Empire, Martin!" he said, as they climbed the ladder leading to the cabin.

The next hour was taken up with collecting and examining the specimens spread out on the locker, the Professor chuckling delightedly over the number of different objects.

"What an assistant you would make!" he said. "If only you wouldn't take things over without telling me," he added, with an arm round his friend's shoulder.

When everything was packed the Professor decided to inspect the equipment on the "Luna I" to see to what extent the journey had damaged it, and Martin was left alone in the cabin where he had spent so many days and nights and seen so many things–frightening, beautiful, hideous, and peaceful.

In a few minutes he would have to abandon his ship, leaving her to the merciless glare of the lunar day. Her great, softly shining casing would melt and shrivel in the burning heat; her engine would drip molten metal on the dry ash ground. His eyes smarted and his breath caught in his throat and stopped. He unscrewed one of the little red buttons that cased the lights and slipped it in his pocket. Not that he needed anything to remember her by–he'd never forget her as long as he lived.

A shout from the Professor as he tumbled head first out of the engine-room brought Martin round on his heel.

"The time," gabbled the Professor. "Where's my mask? We're late." He struggled with his mask, shoulder-

ing the rucksack full of treasures, and pulled Martin through the cabin door. "We must run our fastest to the 'Luna'; we'll only just be in time."

Martin caught the sleeping cat in his arms and whistled to Scruff, and with one last look at the "Luna I's" cabin, jumped to the ground.

The man and boy leapt for their lives over the boulders, and soon the "Luna I" was hidden by the rocks and hills to await the fate of all abandoned ships.

The little group of anxious men waved frantically from the cabin door of the "Luna", urging the two leaping figures forward.

"We were mad to let the pair of them out of our sight," stormed Major Topham. "One is as bad as the other."

Martin stopped and ran back a few yards.

"What's that dratted boy going to do now?" went on Major Topham in despair.

Martin came dashing up the ladder to the cabin, hugging a lump of lava rock.

"I thought we needed a new door-stop," he grinned at his father.

The party settled themselves in their hammocks. Jane curled up by her father's side, and Martin crouched between Sergeant Hodson's knees as he took his seat in the pilot's hammock; the Professor stood looking out of the cabin door before he finally closed it.

"We're just in time," he said. "Look!"

Over the mountains came the incandescent lamp of the sun, its huge shoulder just showing between the mountain ranges. The door shut with a bang.

"All ready, Sergeant?"

"All ready, Professor."

The little red buttons glowed; the light over the lever handle shone softly. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. . . .

Chapter XVII

THE crowd assembled in the great lecture-hall of the Royal Interplanetary Society impatiently awaiting the arrival of the boy and girl explorers.

Two days had passed since the return of the "Luna" to earth, and apart from large-type news headings in almost every newspaper in the world, details of their exploits had been scarce. But to-morrow their story–the most extraordinary story in all history–would burst on the awaiting public. Some readers would shiver at the trials and misfortunes which had befallen the two daring travellers; others would look at the huge luminous globe shining down on them and sigh. There would be some unhappy people who would long for the chance of escape from this world, which gave little to them except boredom and heartbreak; others, who were more fortunate, would read

of the adventurers while snugly tucked up in bed, then put out the light and go contentedly to sleep, thankful for their warm beds and happy lives.

The hum of conversation and scraping of chairs went on long after the lecture-hall had been packed almost to suffocation point. People were standing on tip-toe at the back of the crowd, flattened against the wall and grumbling that they could neither hear nor see. The air was stuffy and hot. An attendant walking steadily down one of the aisles with a disinfectant spray, which only added to the stuffiness, until someone opened a window, letting in the earthly fog, the good, honest, smoky smell smothering the sweet-scented one from the attendant's spray.

A narrow door at the back of the speakers' platform opened, and a shy, dark-haired girl came slowly through to the platform. In spite of her shyness she was quite conscious that she looked her prettiest in her new white party dress. She was followed by a boy whose nervousness showed only in his paleness and slightly strained expression. Close at his heels capered a wire-haired terrier, freshly bathed, trimmed, and clipped, and with an air of the World's Champion. The last arrival was a sturdy, black-bearded man in the early forties, who stepped briskly forward, holding one hand out to Jane and putting the other on Martin's shoulder.

The applause started with Jane's appearance. Scruff, who, in spite of his stay in the land of silence, still dearly loved noise, joined in the commotion with his delighted barking.

The Professor smilingly lifted a hand, and the applause gradually died down. One die-hard at the back of the hall kept on for a few seconds, but found no followers, so he, too, subsided. There was dead

silence; no one coughed or scraped a chair, and not one pair of eyes moved from the three figures in front of them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," began the Professor, "there is not the slightest necessity for me to introduce Martin and Jane Ridley: their names must be known all over the world by this time. Neither is it necessary for me to describe to you their adventures and trials–and they have experienced many since they left the earth on their hazardous journey–for those of you fortunate enough to be able to buy a newspaper to-morrow morning will read the account of their whole voyage and of their stay on the moon. But there is one thing that touches us all. We all know and love our Empire–the Empire for which we have fought many long and hard wars. To this Empire of ours has been added not another continent, or a country, or even part of a country; but another world–a world which may prove to be rich in minerals and properties so far unknown to us. When the specimens which these children collected have been analysed, this Empire may be the richest in the world.

"The information gathered from the log book which Martin Ridley so carefully kept all through his journey will be of the highest value to science in all branches; for he and his sister undertook this journey with no equipment and with little knowledge of the dangers which were ahead. If they had not outwitted us all," he smiled, "we would have gone on our flight, but we would have been prepared for most of the things which this boy and girl experienced: we would have guarded against them; therefore we would have learnt little. These explorers were not guarded against them, so their courage and endeavour will assist science a hundred per cent. more than our journey would have done.

"And now I think the first Man on the Moon would like to say something to you."

The Professor stepped back while the audience applauded.

Martin gazed at the sea of white faces below him, and knew terror for the first time.

"Give me all the meteors in the universe," he thought.

"Take your hands out of your pockets," Jane muttered under the cover of the applause.

The order was instantly obeyed.

Martin caught the steady, grey eyes of his father, who was sitting in one of the front chairs. He put his hands behind his back and took a step forward.

"Thank you for the welcome that you have given us on our return to the earth." Now he had started he felt better. "Professor Erdleigh has told us of all the anxiety and trouble we caused by stowing away in the 'Luna I', and we hope by now that we have both been forgiven.

"I mean to return to the moon one day and to continue the exploration where I left off. The 'Luna I' was the finest ship that anyone has ever sailed in." His voice faltered a little. "But we had to leave her behind.

"There is one member of the crew Professor Erdleigh has forgotten to mention. It was through his strength, intelligence, and courage that we survived: twice, without his help, we would have died. I think he has earned the title of the 'strong man of the party'."

He bent down and patted the white, rough head at his feet. The "strong man of the party" hastily licked his master's hand and barked his approval of the tribute and the applause that followed.

"And now," the Professor said, grasping Jane's hand tightly, "at last comes the Girl on the Moon!"

The applause broke out once more as Jane, blushing

pinkly to the roots of her hair, smiled tongue-tied at the faces before her.

"Thank you," she whispered, and stepped back to the Professor's side.

"There is one more thing," announced the Professor, silencing the applauding, stamping audience. "We felt that we would like our explorer friends to have some memento of this journey–something that they can keep and remember us by when they grow up, as a token of our admiration. As I knew them both and claimed them as my friends, I was asked to decide on the right kind of memento. I hope my judgment has been correct."

At a signal from him the door opened at the back of the hall and shouts of "Mind your backs, please", "Clear the way there", were heard, to the accompaniment of trundling wheels.

The electric light caught the bright brasswork of the telescope on the low trolley as the two attendants wheeled it forward towards the speakers' platform. The telescope was about three feet high, its metal shining new and clear. The attendants grinned cheerfully as they stood aside, glancing from the bewildered boy on the platform to the beautiful instrument on the trolley. A touch on Martin's shoulder made him jump.

"It's yours, Martin," the Professor's voice whispered.

Martin leapt down from the platform: the sea of faces beneath him no longer existed; Jane, Scruff and the Professor were all far away. He touched the fine, sensitive instrument in a dream; he felt incapable of any collected thoughts; in all his life . . . He heard the Professor's voice going on above him through a haze:

"The Girl on the Moon was a much more difficult problem; but with the help of her charming mother I think we may please her."

The Professor fished in his pocket and produced a leather case and pressed the gilt fastening. A miniature diamond moon twinkled in the light. He took it out with care and pinned it to the frills of Jane's collar, and kissed her hand with a grace which made several learned professors turn their heads in astonishment.

"We have not forgotten the 'strong man of the party'," continued the Professor, diving into another pocket.

Something flashed silver. He bent down and substituted Scruff's worn leather collar for a softly shining metal one–the metal was the same unnamed metal that had been used in the "Luna I".

Martin had returned to the platform. Both he and Jane were too bewildered to say anything; but Scruff, as usual, saved the situation. He began to scratch furiously at his new collar, amidst roars of laughter from the audience.

It was with a great sense of relief that the trio, followed by the capering terrier, escaped through the narrow door away from the applauding and cheering crowd.

Martin wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"I was never so scared in my life," he muttered.

"I liked it," said Jane.

"You'll be used to it one day," the Professor told him. "And now," continued the Professor, "we have an appointment with Sir Archibald."

"Sir Archibald?" queried Jane.

"Sir Archibald Crawshay, the Astronomer Royal. In spite of his awe-inspiring title, he's the most friendly and kindest man alive: one of my oldest and most valued friends. He insists on seeing you both, and I believe on issuing an invitation . . . but all that later."

The Professor led his two young friends to a door at the end of the corridor; he opened it and stood aside for the rather nervous boy and girl to enter.

A small, wiry man with grey hair and a rather untidy grey moustache came hastily forward to meet them.

"There's no need to be introduced," he said, shaking hands with them. "I know you both. You have caused us all more excitement, more worry and more joy at seeing you both alive than any boy and girl in the world," he went on, laughing as he pushed the armchairs forward. "In fact, Henry Hodson has grown his first grey hairs." Professor Erdleigh's assistant shuffled his feet in the background. "There are so many things I want to ask you, so many things you will have to tell me, that I suggest a little week-end party in the country. I know your mother and father will not be able to spare you, but they have accepted my invitation to spend next week-end with me as well, and as, of course, no scientific gathering will be complete without the Professor, he will make up the party with Henry to take notes. So much for our social arrangements. Now you, Martin, have no doubt already decided on your future career: no boy who has done the things you have done could settle to a life outside science in some branch or another. But in spite of your achievements, you are still a schoolboy, and you have several years in front of you in a schoolroom and an examination hall. You are not going to find it easy to settle down, I know. But if you want to continue the career which you have so well started, you must work. Work in your school for a few years, and then, if you are still determined to spend the rest of your life among telescopes and rockets, there will always be work for you to do. By the time you are old enough for this it's unlikely that I will be still in office; but I think it is quite safe to name my successor"–the little grey-haired man glanced at his sturdy, black-bearded friend–"and he will need an intelligent and loyal assistant; for Henry will have soared to great heights by

then." Sir Archibald put a kindly hand on the tall young man's shoulders. "So my advice is work: the harder you work the sooner that part will be over, and the sooner you will be able to attain your ambition. And for you, Miss Jane," he said, laying his hand lightly on her head, "with your pretty face there is no need for an old man to give you any advice."

He caught sight of Henry's admiring eyes following the graceful, dark-haired girl as she crossed the room to her brother's side.

Sir Archibald walked to the lift with them, making final arrangements for the following week-end. Scruff, very subdued by his new and most uncomfortable collar, trotted at their heels. The Astronomer Royal and the two young explorers waved a temporary goodbye through the steel grill as the lift whisked them to the ground floor.

They found their father and mother surrounded by a circle of friends, who welcomed Martin and Jane as soon as they stepped out of the lift, followed by the Professor carrying Scruff.

Mr. Ridley was anxious to start on their journey home to Kent, as the fog was coming up, and he was never quite sure of his brakes, so they all piled into the ancient car. The Professor, although he had not been invited, took it for granted that he was meant to join the party, and scrambled in, still carrying the bored, sulky terrier.

The noisy old car engine chugged its way down the familiar lanes and roads; the smell of burning leaves came through the slightly foggy autumn evening, which was darkening into purple: and the still trees were silhouetted against the starless sky. The birds had already nested for the night. Not even the lowing of stray cattle broke the peaceful stillness. The steady drip from the

water-mill welcomed them as the car drew noisily up to the gate of Mill House.

Everyone began talking at once as they climbed out of the car and straggled up the garden path, teasing Mr. Ridley because he had forgotten which pocket he had put the latchkey in. He opened the front door on the darkened hall and with an exclamation tripped forward.

"I don't think much of your door-stop, Martin," he called over his shoulder as he switched on the hall lamp.

The lump of lava which Martin had carefully brought from the moon had been shattered with the toe of his father's shoe, and was simply a mass of dust and rock fragments.

The cries of dismay that followed were cut short by a sharp exclamation from the Professor, who was on his knees by the dusty mass.

"Don't move anyone. Martin, get me something quickly to sweep these fragments into–a fire shovel and hearth brush will do–quickly."

The Professor's voice sounded high-pitched with excitement.

"What is it?" inquired Jane.

But she had no reply.

The Professor carried the loaded fire-shovel into the dining-room and deposited it in the middle of the table.

"Lights," he called–"as many lights as you can switch on!"

The family looked inquiringly at each other as the Professor prodded the ash with a delicate forefinger, then picked up a rounded object and held it in the palm of his hand. It was a human skull.

"Your ants, your bats, and your snakes were interesting," the Professor said, still in a suppressed, high-pitched voice, "but this proves without the slightest

doubt that there was once human life on the moon. How many thousands of years old this fossilised skull of a human being is we don't know: we may find out something." He turned to Martin and held out the skull. "This belongs to you."

The copper, misty moonlight came through the open bedroom window on the sleeping boy. On a chair beside his bed was a human skull and a tiny red glass button.